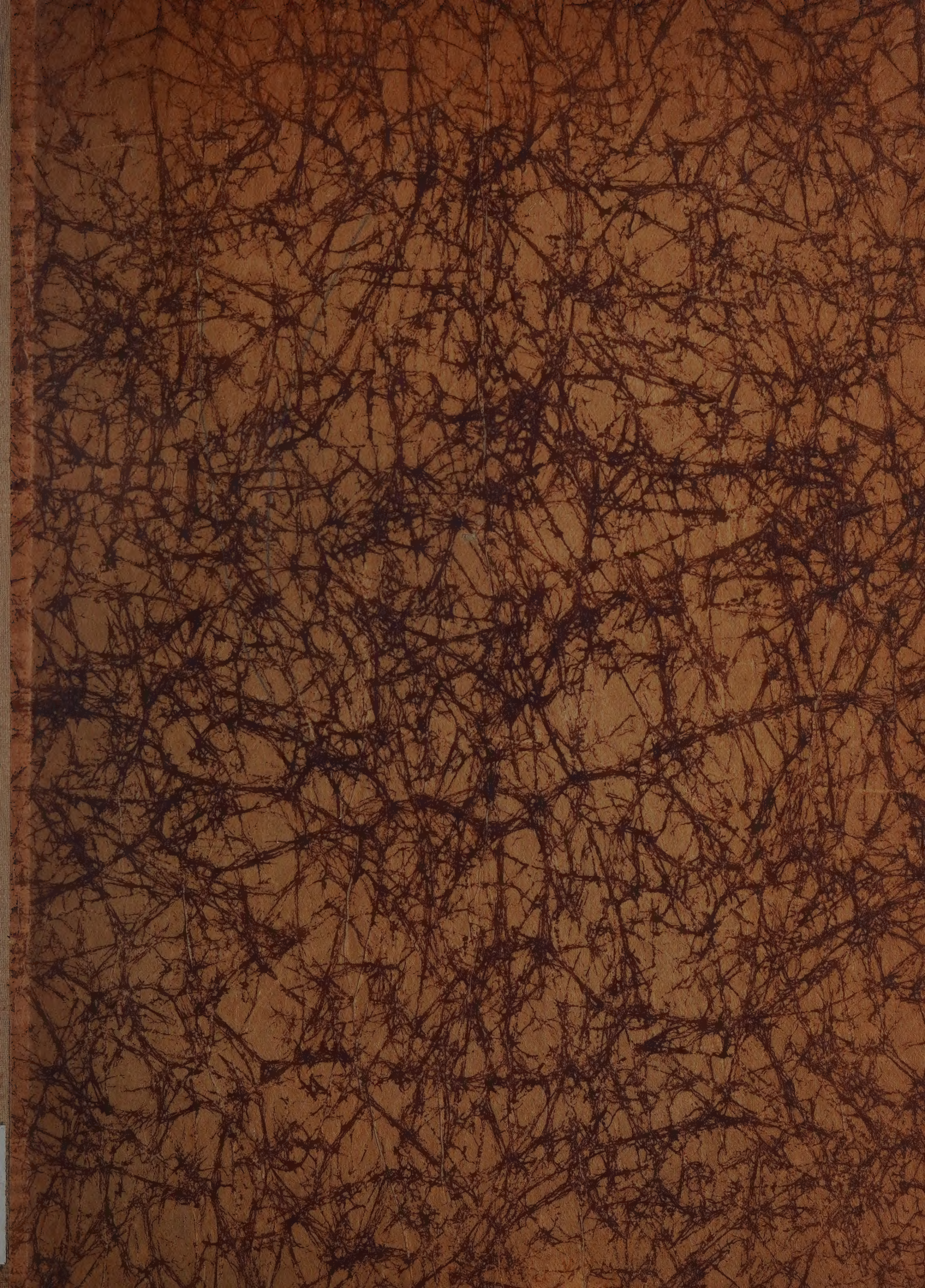
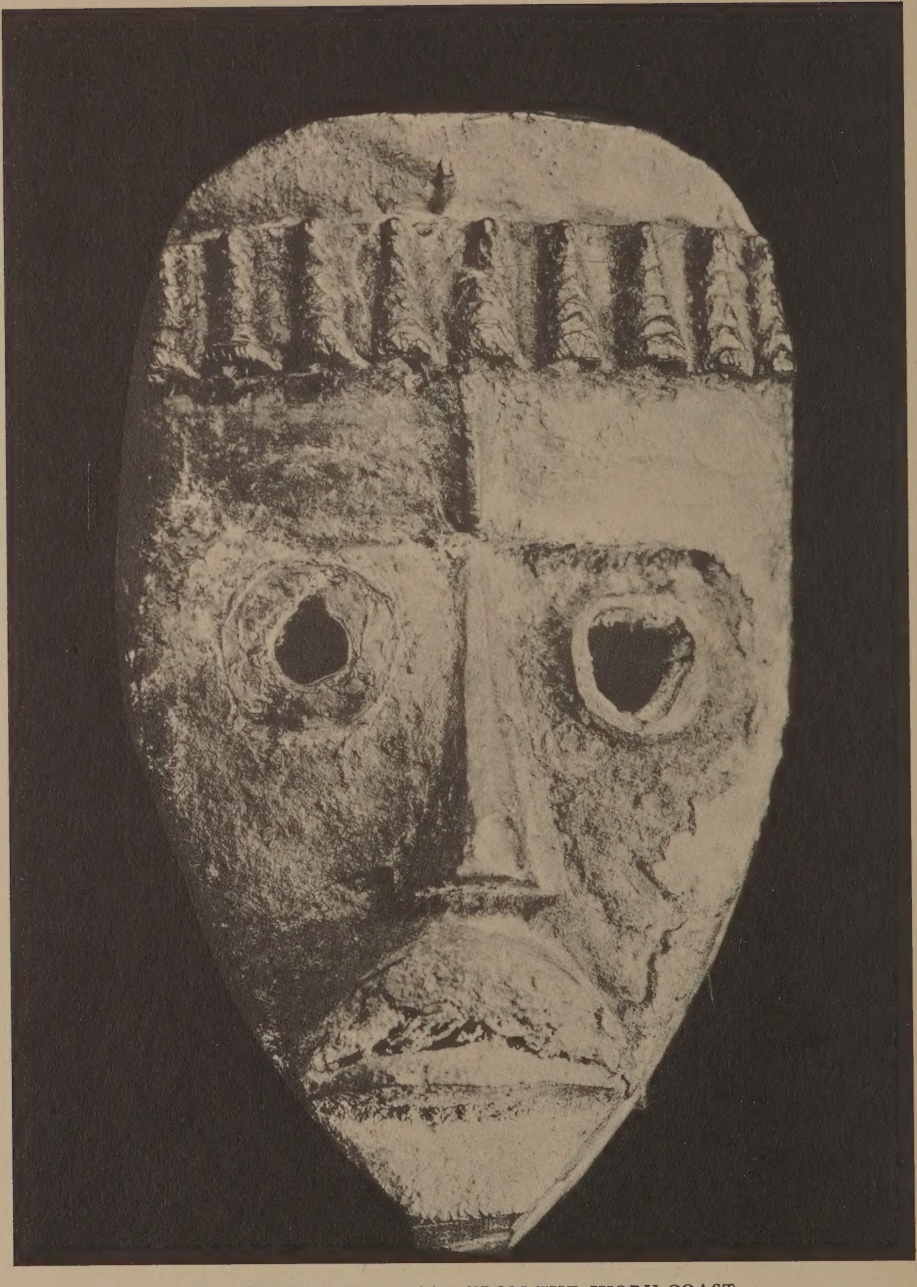


PRIMITIVE NEGRO SCULPTURE



I. CEREMONIAL MASK FROM THE IVORY COAST
(see page 51)

PRIMITIVE
NEGRO SCULPTURE

by PAUL GUILLAUME
and THOMAS MUNRO

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM THE
COLLECTION OF THE BARNES FOUNDATION
AT MERION, PENNSYLVANIA

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P. G.
T. M.

PRIMITIVE NEGRO SCULPTURE

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INTRODUCTION

1. *The Growth of Interest in African Art*

SCARCELY twenty years ago, negro sculpture was known only to an occasional missionary, who would write home with horror of the "hideous little idols" of the savages, and to a few explorers and ethnologists, who collected it among other phenomena of African life, without suspecting that it might ever be taken seriously as art. If any artist happened to notice one of the figures, it was no doubt with a feeling of complacency, that civilized art had gone so far ahead of these clumsy, misshapen attempts at reproducing the human form.

Around 1907, a few people in Paris, interested in contemporary art movements, began talking of negro sculpture. Painters who were trying to produce certain new effects on canvas (to be described later in this book) suddenly found that similar effects had been achieved with remarkable success in primitive African art. They declared that the small wooden figures, carved centuries ago by unknown artists of the jungle, were superior in many ways to the finished products of the academies. These figures were not mere childish attempts to make our kind of statue; they were successful attempts to make an entirely different kind of statue. Where they seemed to be misshapen, badly proportioned, they were really fashioned with consummate skill to achieve effects that Europeans had not been able to see or appreciate. Instead of being the beginnings of art, valuable only as historical relics, they were perhaps a stage in advance of European evolution, and valuable as ideals.

Academic critics replied that such claims were preposterous; their eyes, trained in Greek standards of sculptural beauty, could see in the negro fetish only something grotesquely comic, repellent, or at best curiously bizarre. But a few of the younger men began copying the negro motives, adapting them to the media of stone and paint, treating modern subjects in the negro manner, talking and writing of negro sculpture ecstatically and a little incoherently. Venturesome collectors and dealers bought a few pieces; exhibitions were given and rapidly sold. The small supply of genuine and important objects was soon exhausted; others came but slowly from remote tropical villages. For the art had long been dead in Africa, and only the ancestral heirlooms, centuries old and sacred, were to be desired. But enterprising manufacturers, there and in Europe, began counterfeiting them, and reaped a harvest from directors of provincial museums. Everything negro, good or bad, real or false, found and still finds a ready market at prices many hundred times those of a few years ago. Monographs and articles, erudite and rhapsodic, have appeared in several languages, discussing, praising and denouncing the newly discovered art from every point of view. Today it is impossible to deny its importance as an influence on contemporary art, and the number is considerable of critics who place it among the world's great sculptural traditions.

The mere fact of a few years' popularity is of course no proof of lasting value. Artists without number, movements and schools of art, have been a seven days' or seven years' wonder, then sunk into the oblivion of outmoded fads. In particular, there is apt to be a specious fascination about things that are unfamiliar, exotic and primitive. Restless minds have often reviled the Greek tradition for its cloying perfectness, have wearied of the most substantial æsthetic diets, only to return to them again when the novelty of the substitute has worn off. The lure of strange foreign lands, their manners and products, can be intense but short-lived. Overcivilized and jaded imaginations, especially, tend to worship the rude strength of the primitive, to dream of the noble savage and endow him with mythical virtues. To such minds the gaily colored garment of the South Sea Islander seems beautiful chiefly because it calls up thoughts of his languorous, unconventional life; the African fetish is an excuse for dreaming of deep mysterious forests, tom-toms and weird incantations, of dark warriors and women of the tropics. Delightful as such reveries may be, they are a sort of pleasure quite distinct from enjoyment of the object's merits as a work of art; they may be induced by any crude fragment, or, in a vivid imagination, by nothing more than the mystic word "Samarcand" or "Congo."

If the popularity of negro sculpture rests upon such adventitious charms, it too will be short-lived. Time, perhaps, can be the only final test. Meanwhile, the persistent interest of painters and sculptors in the negro form, the variety of ways they are using it for subjects quite remote from African life, is some indication that it is being found significant on purely æsthetic grounds as well. If critics can throw any light on the question, it will be through showing what qualities an artist can find of interest in this type of sculpture. Only after understanding what these qualities are, surely, can one justifiably pronounce upon their greatness or lack of it.

2. *Writings on the Subject*

PRONOUNCEMENTS in plenty have been made, eulogies and condemnations; it is now the fashion to include them in any book on modern art. But one searches in vain for a clear and simple statement of what distinguishes negro sculpture from other kinds, what specific traits in it are being praised or condemned. Two or three short articles on special exhibitions contain suggestive but fragmentary remarks on certain aspects of the question.*

* The best of these is Roger Fry's article *Negro Sculpture* (1920) in *Vision and Design.*

There are several brochures of photographic reproductions;* each has a short text with a few miscellaneous facts and comments, but no attempt at a thorough discussion of the figures as art. The illustrations are labeled (often wrongly) with the names of the tribes or territories from which they are supposed to have come. But no effort is made to describe the characteristics of these various localities. Few writers, in fact, seem to have any idea that there exist several well-marked varieties and traditions of negro sculpture.

The lack of adequate interpretation is no doubt due in part to lack of facilities for study. Not until the recent opening of the Barnes Foundation, for purposes of education and research, has there been available a collection representing all the chief schools of negro sculpture, selected entirely from the standpoint of artistic value. Fairly large collections are on view in the museums of Paris, London, Brussels, Berlin and other cities, but almost all have been assembled on the basis of ethnology rather than of art. Consequently, they include a confusing mass of objects interesting only as specimens of native life and industry. Of those selected on artistic grounds, none has been sufficiently representative of the many varieties to make possible a survey that is both concrete and comprehensive.

There is another and deeper reason for the lack of adequate interpretation — a reason which applies as well to writing on other branches of art. Enough good examples have long been available to allow of much more penetrating criticism than has ever been written. But every conceivable way of writing about negro statues has been tried, apparently, except that of observing them directly and describing clearly their important characteristics. Each writer has seemed to take it for granted that everyone knew these elementary facts, or else that they were too subtle to be expressed, and has gone on to more interesting topics, to final evaluations and to all manner of sidelights on the question.

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* For example, *Sculptures nègres,* with prefaces by Paul Guillaume and Guillaume Apollinaire (Paris, 1917); H. Clouzot et A. Level, *L'art nègre et l'art océanien* (Paris, 1919) and *Sculptures africaines et océaniennes* (Paris, 1925); C. Einstein, *Negerplastik* (Munich, 1920) and *Afrikanische Plastik* (in the series Orbis Pictus); E. von Sydow, *Exotische Kunst; Afrika und Ozeanien* (Leipzig, 1921). See also the chapters on African art in H. Kühn's *Die Kunst der Primitiven* and in W. Hausenstein's *Barbaren und Klassiker* (both Munich, 1923).

Much has been written, for example, by ethnologists more or less learned in African dialects and customs. Some of this is genuinely scientific and useful in its own field,* but it offers little help toward an artistic estimate. Some authors work out abstruse metaphysical theories about the African consciousness. Some describe exhaustively the religious rites in which masks and fetishes were used, theorize about solar myths, trace the antecedents of native deities, interpret with pages of hieroglyphics the tribal tattoo-marks on statues. They reveal a portentous similarity between the West-African and the Latin name for the Fire-God, and suggest that it implies some profound connection between the arts of these two peoples.† But of the sculptural qualities of the statues hardly a word. Æsthetic judgments, to be sure, are scattered casually, as if they were axiomatic; this figure is well-proportioned; that tribe is artistically superior—meaning, of course, that it is nearer to academic European standards.

At the other extreme is the writing of artists about art. Feeling intuitively the qualities of a work of art, perhaps, they are usually inarticulate when it comes to expressing these feelings, and illogical in reasoning about them. To seize a pen dissolves such a writer into vague rhapsodies, flowery, incoherent, confused. A tide of feeling sweeps him far above the objects he is discussing, obscures them with a mist of metaphors and dreams. His enthusiasm is eloquent, but the critical reader emerges unconvinced and even prejudiced against the type of art that aroused so extravagant a eulogy.

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* E. g., the work of Torday and Joyce, especially their account of explorations among the Bushongo, published in the Ethnological Series of the *Annales du Musée du Congo* (Brussels, 1910), and Mr. Joyce's account of the African collection in the British Museum, in the *Handbook* of that museum.

† E. g., Ernst Fuhrmann, *Afrika* (Hagen and Darmstadt, 1922). The writings of Leo Frobenius, explorer and anthropologist, were among the first to call attention to African art, but were largely devoted to non-æsthetic aspects, of the kinds just mentioned. (*Die Kunst der Naturvölker*, in Westermann's Monatshefte, Jahrgang XI, 1895–6; *Die Bildende Kunst der Afrikaner*, in Mitteilungen der anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien, 1897–8.)

The professional art critic, as a rule, affects a little of both styles, the scientific and the emotional. The manner is easy, journalistic, sprinkled with scientific phrases, but enlivened with anecdotes that reveal his personal acquaintance with celebrities, and his knowledge of the lives of minor artists of the past. He is inclined to be blasé, with an air of having outgrown callow enthusiasms, but of possessing an exquisitely rarefied sensitivity to beauties which the vulgar can never feel. His comment on negro art will consist of a little gossip of art circles, a few generalities expressed in vague technical jargon, a few dogmatic appraisals and much airing of personal preferences. Negro art is "symmetrical rather than rhythmic," "architectonic rather than plastic," "not composed but balanced," "the work of slightly synthetic artists."* The "niggers" are "incapable of profound conceptions"; they "fail generally to create organic wholes"; they "seem hardly to have attempted to conceive the figure afresh for themselves"; they are "like birds building their nests," but lack "that passionate affirmation of a personal vision."† In so far as these remarks have any meaning at all, the following pages may serve to show their utter untruth. They deserve no specific refutation, but illustrate the confusion that is caused in every new field by premature and over-confident generalizations.

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* Willard Huntington Wright, *Modern Painting* (New York, 1923).

† Clive Bell, *Negro Sculpture*, in *Since Cézanne* (London, 1922).

3. *The Method of the Present Study*

The following pages attempt to bring together as briefly and simply as possible some facts which may help toward an appreciation of negro art and an understanding of its influence on contemporary art movements. The method employed has been in active use for several years in courses of art appreciation, based on the collection of ancient and modern sculpture and painting of which the examples shown in this book are a part. It differs from most art criticism in trying to avoid subjective reverie and unverifiable generalization, and in the systematic attempt to see instead, as clearly and objectively as possible, the demonstrable qualities in the works of art themselves, and their relation to the conscious processes of the observer. An attempt is made to consider the plastic qualities of the figures—their effects of line, plane, mass and color—apart from all associated facts.

It is natural that anyone interested in the figures themselves should be interested also in the subjects, and in the sort of people that made them: how the African lived, what god or being he intended to portray, in what strange rites he used the mask or fetish one is looking at. Beyond a doubt, since art is intimately bound up with the rest of life, these facts have largely determined the forms his art assumed. But just how these influences work is a tremendously intricate question; one can only guess at it, and to do even that in any detail would exceed the intended limits of this essay. A few possible relationships will be suggested along the way, and the first chapter is devoted entirely to a sketch of the racial, geographical, social and religious background. There can be no doubt, however, that to bear such matters constantly in mind tends to confuse one's appreciation of the plastic qualities in themselves. From the artistic point of view the important question is not what subjects the sculptor chose, but how he executed them, with what distinctive uses of his medium. Only after perceiving what these forms are could one hope to trace out their historical causes; attempting the latter first tends to fill the mind with preconceptions and to obscure one's vision of the objects as sculpture.

Likewise, the influence of negro art on contemporary movements is a subject in itself, though both may perhaps be understood more clearly by seeing their relations to each other, by seeing what there is in common between this primitive art and present-day aspirations. This question is considered in the final chapter.

Three distinct aspects of the subject are thus presented, with a few hints about their interrelation. The object throughout, it may be well to say again, is not to prove that negro sculpture is or is not great as compared with other forms. It is to assist the reader in finding out for himself whether he can be pleased and interested by this kind of art, and by the modern tendencies it is helping to direct.

CHAPTER I

ITS RELATION TO AFRICAN LIFE

1. *The Negro Mind*

WHAT is much to be desired as a background for the study of negro art is an understanding of the primitive negro mind, a sympathy with its feeling in the presence of nature, its gods and its images. But how can that spirit be recaptured? The primitive negro, untouched by civilization, is almost a creature of the past. As the outside world establishes contact with him, investigates his ways, he changes before its eyes into a new being, a compound of the old and new.

In the partly civilized black, in Africa, Europe or America, there is no easy way to separate what is truly negro from what is acquired or developed in response to new conditions. Passivity, lack of initiative and organization, intellectual backwardness, occasional irresponsibility of conduct—are these his native traits or the results of centuries of slavery and lack of opportunity, of constant assurance by the whites that he is hopelessly inferior? The new rhythms which he is contributing to modern music, his Christian "spirituals," his "blue songs" of crooning melancholy, his hilarious "jazz"—how much of all this did he bring from Africa? Likewise in Africa itself, the black ruled by European masters is a different being from his ancestors. The slave of the rubber plantation, lazy or rebellious, the petty thief along the water-front, the chief with eyes of solemn dignity above a parody of European clothing, the mission schoolboy puzzled with Christian doctrine—these are not the makers of African art. Nor can we conclude from their failure to assume a leading rôle in the new world that the cause is a weakness in their ancestral stock. Negroes are not leaders in our culture, truly; but where have they had an opportunity to become so? They have quickly lost their genius for plastic form, and admire, as most peasant craftsmen do, the vulgarest of our artistic tinsel; but where have they been allowed, on any large scale, to learn the best in our art, or to have the best in their own developed sympathetically? We cannot take the modern negro, in process of civilization, as a trustworthy clue to the mentality of the primitive artist.

Supposed authorities on Africa give us widely different accounts of the black man's nature. To the earlier missionaries he was the incarnation of filth, obscenity and cannibalism; to the later ones, backed by automatic rifles, he is a pathetic child, slow to comprehend the Gospel and prone to backsliding. To the romanticist, he is an ideal of happy simplicity, a dark god striding through forest and sunlight, at peace with animals, trees and flowers. From the accounts of scientific explorers, it would appear that there is something of truth in all these versions, even allowing for prejudice. There are as many different kinds of negroes, tribes and individuals, as of white men; they are honest and dishonest, blood-thirsty and peaceful, industrious and lazy, stupid and intelligent.

One general fact does emerge, unquestionably: they developed no durable intellectual culture, no technique of applied science or logic of abstract reasoning. Why this is true is a matter we must leave to the warring schools of anthropologists. Was it because of a lack of native powers, or because environment made unnecessary the exertion of powers that were latent? Were the negro's social and intellectual developments a failure or a success in dealing with his particular environment?

In making all such generalizations there is serious danger of going too far. If the negro lacked or failed to develop some one social or intellectual quality, it does not follow that he failed in all. Yet we constantly assume it. From preconceptions of the negro mind we judge negro sculpture in advance. Because he could not analyze a concept in abstract terms, critics have inferred that he lacked all power of analysis, including that of plastic forms into their elements. Because he is thought to lack powers of organization (in spite of his elaborate tribal system) they have said that his sculpture lacks organization in the sense of plastic unity. In general, because he is often helpless, crude and clumsy in civilization, they have assumed that he never could feel sensitively, create anything graceful, delicate, dignified or powerful. Could anything good come out of Nazareth, or out of Darkest Africa?

Since there is little definite knowledge about the negro mind, the best we can do with hypotheses about it is not to let them determine in advance our judgment of negro art, but to forget who made it and look at it afresh. In fact, the order may well be reversed; negro art is perhaps the most revealing source we shall ever have for understanding the primitive negro mind. In music and poetry, as well as in sculpture, there have lately been surprising revelations of its fertility. Junod's work, *Les chants et les contes des Barongas*, years ago disclosed the unusual subtlety of African musical rhythms. The *Anthologie nègre* of Blaise Cendrars has revealed a world of folklore full of vivid imagery, of spirits known in every natural object, woven into picturesque, miraculous legends, full of a calm indifference in the face of horror and death, of a whimsical, almost urbane sophistication about women and love, of a mellow, good-humored wisdom about many basic problems and values of living. A consideration of African sculpture will give still further reason for caution in generalizing about the negro mind and its potentialities or lack of them. As positive evidence, what could be more revealing of the nature of fetishism, say, than that it inspired and worshipped such creations? What, in short, more significant of the negro mentality than its products?

There are, of course, libraries full of detailed facts about African culture, industry, folkways, language and social systems. Most of these do not contribute materially to appreciation of the carvings themselves. But a few matters, directly relevant to their manufacture and function in the life of the tribe, will be of interest.

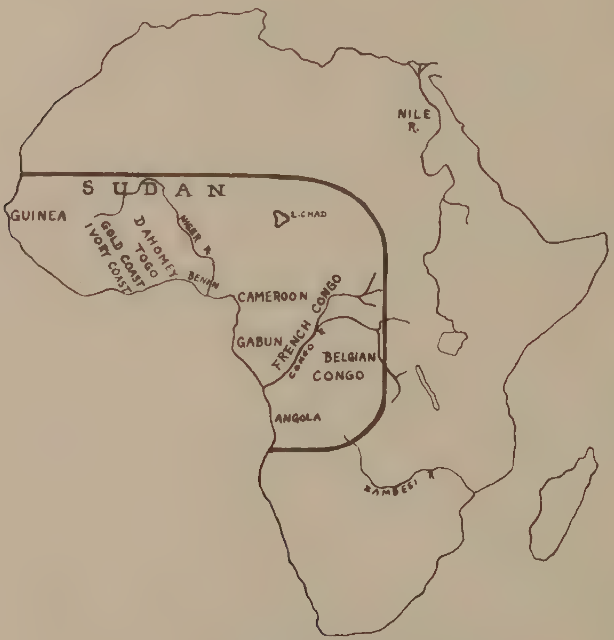
2. *The Art-producing Peoples*

Sculpture flourished in west central Africa through countless generations until about a century ago. Since then it has declined, in some places, perhaps, through a spontaneous decline of creative ability (evidence is lacking to prove this), but no doubt principally through the effects of civilization. Negro sculpture was an integral part of a certain mode of existence that had always been more or less the same; the product of long days of dreamy indolence after furious activity, in the shade with a knife and a log of wood. It was not a pursuit detachable from the fetishist religion, from the tribal organization with its village gods, their priests and ancient rituals. In destroying these things, civilization destroyed the art itself, and the direct assaults of idol-burning missionaries added only the finishing stroke.

No civilized influence ever contributed materially to the art of the fetish-maker. It is of small consequence that, from the ninth century on, Mohammedan Arabs penetrated the Sudan in search of slaves; the negro sculptor learned nothing from them. Some four or five thousand years ago, Egyptian outposts may have pushed far up the sources of the Nile. It may be that early black artisans, slaves of the Pharaohs, carried back into the jungle memories of rigid monuments along the Nile, or, as Guillaume Apollinaire has boldly urged, the black man's art may be the older, and the source of the Egyptian form. Later on, Hindu traders may have carried objects of their own and Chinese art into the Nigerian empires. There are negro carvings that undeniably resemble the Egyptian, just as others look Chinese or Polynesian. But such resemblances occur in many widely separated arts, and prove nothing, seductive as they are to the speculative historian. Between the arts of all primitive peoples, as between their weapons, religious and social institutions, there are apt to be occasional similarities, which are more often the results of parallel development than of direct influence. On the whole, moreover, negro sculpture differs widely from both Egyptian and Chinese. It is the spontaneous development, so far as one can tell, of the black race.

In only one case, the fifteenth and sixteenth century Portuguese colony of Benin, did the union of black and white cultures bear creditable fruit. Here, in southern Nigeria, the natives learned the process of casting bronze with moulds of wax and clay, and with it turned out figures of themselves and their conquerors. It is a hybrid art, weak, but yet a distinctive form, combining both African and European elements. Elsewhere the coming of the white man has meant the passing of the negro artist; behind him remains only an occasional uninspired craftsman dully imitating the art of his ancestors, chipping wood or ivory into a stiff, characterless image for the foreign trade. The art-producing negro, then, was the negro untouched by foreign influences. In studying his background we need pay no attention to the history of white men in Africa, to the thousand years of Arab and European exploring, preaching, enslaving, robbing and squabbling over the spoils.

His environment was a village of huts on some remote tributary of the Niger or the Congo, or where the forest came down to a coast tormented by the ships of slave and ivory raiders. Through a vast expanse of tropical forest and grassy plain on both sides of the equator his tribe and others wandered, settled down for a time and wandered on again. To see its extent on the map one may draw a line from French Guinea on the Atlantic, eastward to Lake Chad and the edge of the Egyptian Sudan; then south through the heart of Africa past Lake Tanganyika to the headwaters of the Zambesi, and westward to the ocean. The most important art-works come from the Ivory Coast and Gabun on the sea, and from the back-country regions of the Southwestern Sudan, the upper and lower Congo; others, usually less impressive, come from French Guinea, Dahomey, Benin and Camerun.



2. THE COUNTRY OF NEGRO ART

These names refer to modern geographical boundaries, imposed by the conquering whites, rather than to any inherent groupings in the descent and culture of the African peoples themselves. The forms of art which proceed from these various regions have, as we shall see, certain broadly distinctive characteristics. But neither the forms nor the people who produced them differ sharply on one side of a modern boundary line from those on the other. Ivory Coast and Gabun are not and never were nations of a fairly definite stock and culture like Italy and Spain. As soon as we look beneath these names we find a countless number of tribes, some more closely interrelated by blood and language than others, but all loosely organized, shifting, mixed and without definite limits, geographical or otherwise. It is impossible to generalize except in the roughest way about the nature of the inhabitants of a given region, because of the diversity of its populations; and if one attempts to describe individual tribes he is lost in an endless task on which ethnologists are still finding it hard to throw any definite light. A few tribes may be mentioned, however, as especially prominent in the production of art: to the northwest the Baule, Bobo, Agui, Mossi, Gouro and Dan; the M'Fang and M'Pongwe in the Gabun region, and further south and east the Bushongo, Baluba, Sibiti, Sangha, Bambalu, Gwembi, Bakelele, Yungu and Bangongo—the last name meaning "People of the Bells."

Investigators have for years been trying to piece together the story of these peoples, but the sources are few and unreliable. The legends of a tribe about its own origin are imaginative and conflicting, although some clue can often be derived from an inherited tradition that the tribe once came from a certain other region, or was descended from a certain ancient race. Most of them wandered extensively, because of forced tribal migrations or a nomadic mode of life. They left hardly any permanent traces, a few stone ruins, probably not very old. Their houses and goods were mostly of perishable material, and those remaining are hard to date because of the long persistence of the same ways of manufacture.

Here and there through the obscurity appears the more definite story of some great early empire, hammered into a loose unity by a chief more powerful than the rest, which endured a little while and then fell to pieces. One such empire, Ghana, was said to have been flourishing in the Western Sudan as early as the third century A.D. This state, of whose probable capital ruins have lately been discovered, was at its height between the seventh and twelfth centuries, reaching from the Atlantic northward to the Niger bend. Aside from a few such definite traditions, the negroes are a people without history; their past can be described only in terms of general racial intermixtures.

It is hard even to estimate how long man has lived in Africa. Palæolithic stone implements have been found in both north and south, in Egypt and the Zambesi valley; neolithic implements, believed by the natives to be thunderbolts, in the Congo Free State and along the west coast. Of all the inhabitants of Africa, only the Bushmen and the Bube of Fernando Po were in a stone age period of culture when discovered. Minerals are plentiful, and found in rich ores, so it may be supposed that their use dates far back, perhaps even to the original settlers of some parts of the continent.

The negro peoples of today are usually divided into two great groups: the Negroes proper and the Bantu. The former are all physically similar, but speak different languages; the latter, who are scattered through the southern half of the continent and as far north as Camerun, are similar in language, but immensely varied physically. The origin of the Bantu is not definitely known, but they are probably a mixture of true Negroes with invading Hamitic tribes from the north.

Tribal movements in Africa seem to have been, on the whole, from north to south and from east to west. One frequent cause is the pressure of warlike tribes who seek expansion, or a more plentiful country, or to escape from some hated ruler. Another, which ethnologists recognize as influential, is the desire for salt, which has drawn great numbers of people slowly toward the western coasts, where that much-desired article of diet is easily obtainable. Once within reach, it becomes an article to export in exchange for other commodities. These and similar forces, no doubt, drove into their present homes the makers of negro art. Here they spread widely into forest and fertile clearings, expelling the aboriginal Bushmen (themselves a people possessed of some artistic vigor in drawing hunting scenes) into the desert wastes. They chose regions fitted to their traditional way of life, or adapted themselves to new environments.

There is considerable difference today between the cultures of peoples in desert, parkland and forest. In the deserts of the north, inhabited by Bushmen and Tuaregs, existence is nomadic; the same is true of the Pygmies in the thickest part of the forest. These peoples live by wandering in search of food ready at hand, animals to hunt or wild vegetable products. From such people, obviously, one could not expect the development of an art of architecture, or the accumulation of many works of art of any sort, for they must be always ready to travel. In the less dense parts of the Congo forest and among the lakes and rivers of the Guinea coast, a settled agricultural form of life is to be found, with the plantain, yam and manioc (the last two of American origin) as staple foods. Around these is a broad strip of parkland, with grassy expanses and occasional trees. Here men are sometimes pastoral and semi-nomadic, driving their cattle in search of pasture and to escape the dreaded tsetse-fly; sometimes they combine the care of cattle with farming and a settled life; their chief foods are millet and milk. In many other ways the people of forest and parkland differ. The former, on the whole, make their clothing of materials taken from plants, tattoo by raised scars, sometimes chip or extract their upper incisor teeth, often practise cannibalism, hunt with a bow strung with fiber or cane, weave baskets and build rectangular houses. In the parkland, clothing is made of skins, spears are the chief weapons, and the bow, when used, is strung with sinew; basket-work is coiled and houses are circular in shape. Here and on the fringe of the forest, where communication is possible, several large empires and confederations of tribes have developed, while in the heart of the forest the village is more or less independent under its own chief. Even in religion there are differences, partly to be accounted for as results of the environment. Ancestor-worship, as a rule, arises only among large social groups, where a single man can wield great power, and where it seems natural to suppose that so great a man will still be powerful after death. Such beliefs are rarely found in the dense forest, where no individual is much more powerful than another. Here we find, indeed, a great variety of animistic beliefs, worship of beings personifying the natural forces, such as rivers, rocks, trees and animals. Fetishes are made and worshipped; death from witchcraft is believed in; ordeals, secret societies, masks, wooden gongs and anthropomorphic figures are found. On the steppes, where agriculture is practised but rain is scarcer than in the forest, the rain-maker is an important personage, and plays a large part in the religious and magical ceremonies of the tribe. Belief in his power, combined with ancestor-worship, is the characteristic religion of this region.

Such facts of social and religious custom have a considerable effect upon the production of art, determining in part what sorts of utensils, weapons and clothing shall be made and decorated, what sorts of idol or mask shall be created as an instrument for propitiating the god, or for expressing religious feeling. Familiarity with wild animals naturally influences the type of figures used in decoration. Skilled artistry develops among peoples of both forest and plain; neither in the open desert nor in the most remote and densely wooded jungles, but as a rule in clearings, where some agriculture is possible. Even the Sudan, though desert or grassy in the north, is thickly forested in the south. Thus negro art is to be associated with a fairly settled agricultural mode of life combined with some hunting, rather than with the purely nomadic, pastoral or agricultural type. It is associated not with the extremely small village units of the dense jungle, but with fairly large tribes and occasional vast empires. For such peoples religion is apt to be a mixture of ancestor-worship with animism.

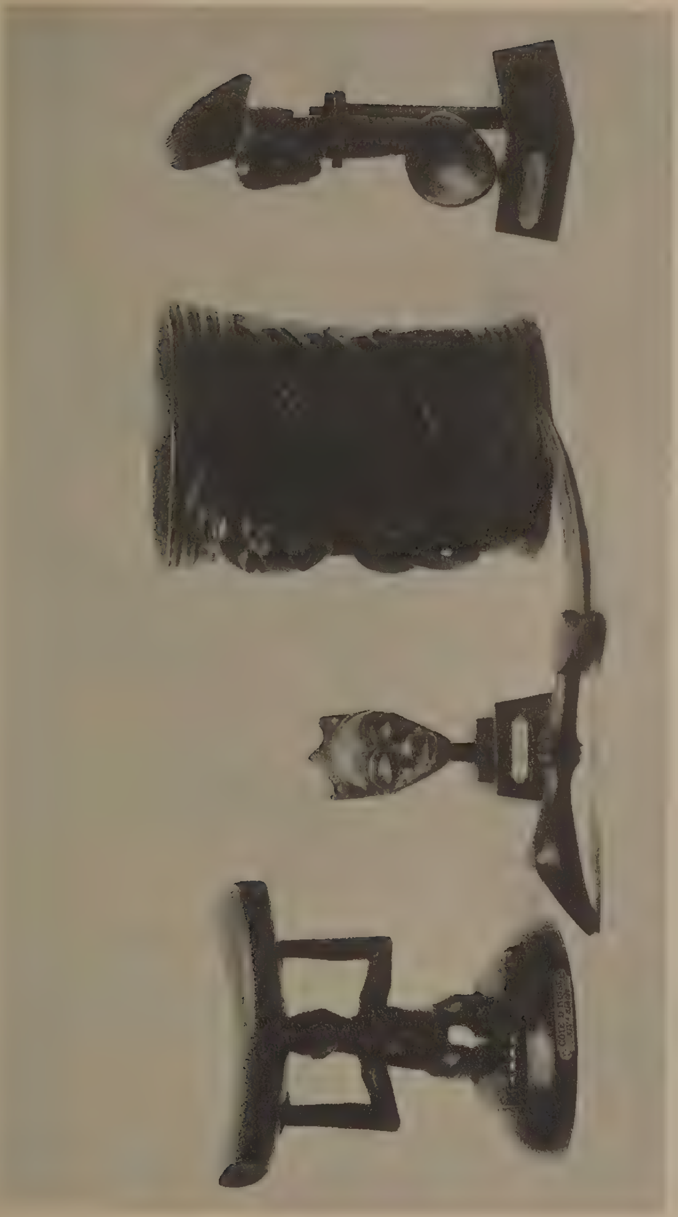
3. *Types of Art-work Produced*

Sculpture was not the only way in which the African artist expressed his æsthetic impulses. Singing of ritual chants, symbolic dancing to the sound of drum, pipe and stringed instruments, the telling over of marvelous stories of ancestors and the spirits of the forest; these were the heritage of every tribe and village, handed down, embroidered and slowly recreated by each new generation. The plastic arts, too, where necessary goods were few and leisure plentiful between the times of harvest, war and hunting, extended to all the objects with which men surrounded themselves. Every utensil was material for decoration.

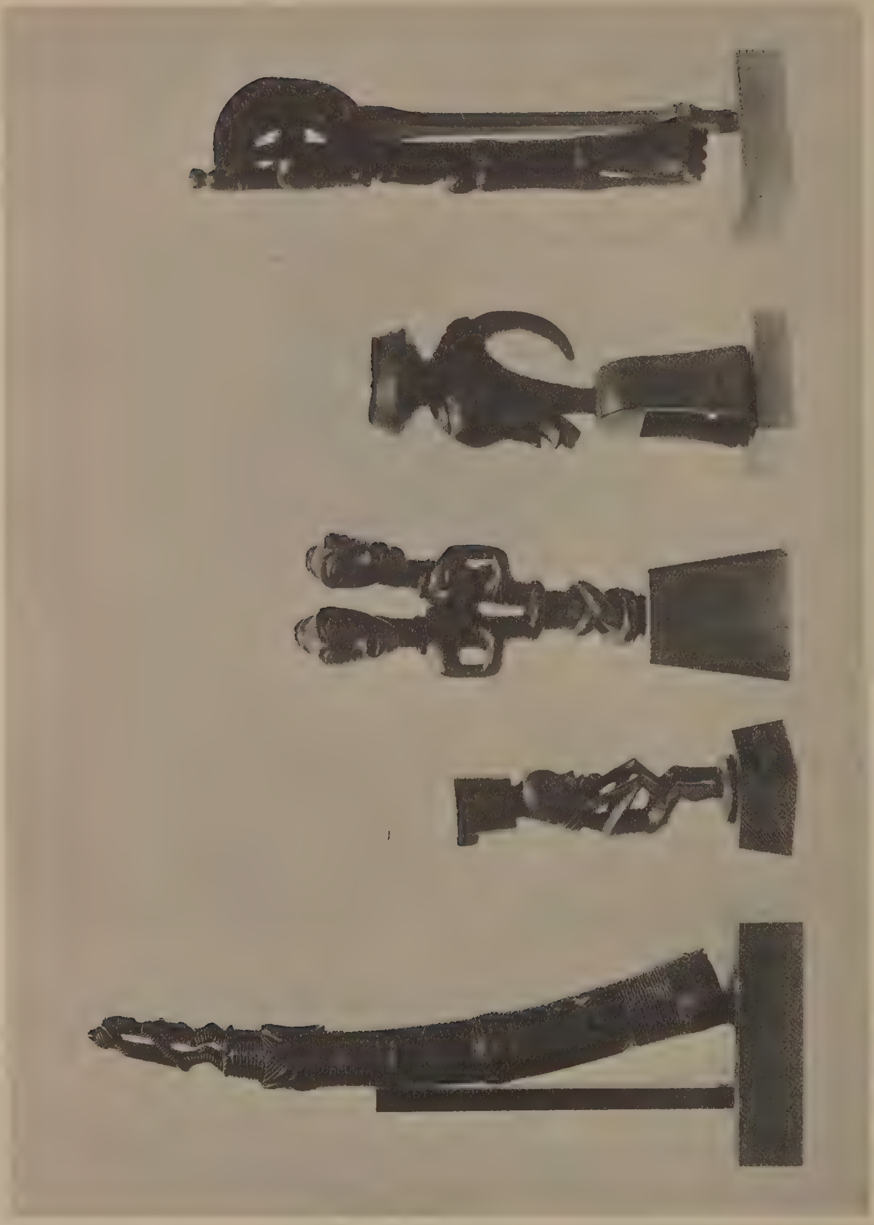
There are, of course, great differences in ability among the tribes; one will excel in pottery-making (the Bantu generally excel the Negroes in this respect), another in the working of iron, while a third will have little or no original craftsmanship, being content to imitate crudely the tools of others, adding nothing in the way of spontaneous decoration. From the accounts of travelers, the Bushongo people of the Kasai River district seem to stand preëminent in a great variety of crafts. They are skillful smiths and introducers of a terrible weapon (their name means "people of the throwing-knife"), and weavers of palm-cloth into elaborate patterns. Such patterns, highly conventional and geometrical, are handed down through generations and designated by particular names. Bushongo children are taught at an early age to make them with thumb and finger in the sand. Some of them take their origin from shapes of animals, others from basket-work, showing the plaiting of straw over and under. They are met with not only in weaving and embroidery, but painted on the cane walls of houses, incised upon cups, or even tattooed upon the human body, with variations appropriate to the object.

Tattooing, in a country where clothes are few, becomes an art in itself. It is not accomplished, as among the light-skinned Polynesians, with pigment, for that would not appear to advantage upon the negro. The design is cut into the skin and the wounds treated so as to raise scarred ridges above the surface. Many of the markings, besides being ornamental, are significant as insignia of some tribal group or secret society. Much labor is also expended in some tribes (such as the Fangs, though not the Bushongo) upon the construction of elaborate coiffures, often on a wooden framework, where it is decorated with feathers and large pins. Such ways of decorating the body, together with the large brass nose-rings, lip-plugs and necklaces which the African loves, are constantly being taken by the wood-carver as themes for decorating his statues, so that they merit attention in relation to sculpture itself.

In addition to the objects mentioned, many others are treated with surface ornament or shaped into structures which are pleasing by their basic form. Weapons are elaborately hammered out, their handles carved with iron wire; the staff of a chief may represent years of patient craftsmanship, until it is fashioned into a useful and



3. CARVED UTENSILS



4. FETISH AND UTENSILS

graceful instrument, minutely carved into designs that symbolize the chief's genealogy and accomplishments. Cups, tobacco-pipes and wooden boxes, richly carved, are also common. Stools, wooden head-rests (to keep the coiffure from being damaged during sleep) and bobbins for winding thread, are treated with careful ingenuity, especially when they are to be the property of a chief or his family. They often contain small carved human figures, to support the seat or curved neck-rest, and therefore must be included within the category of sculpture.* Musical instruments, too, are decorated with human and animal figures and formal designs: drums of wood and skin, bells and rattles, with hammers for striking them, harps, ivory horns, and sometimes an instrument on the principle of the piano, consisting of a resonator (perhaps a skull) and a few iron keys. Small metal weights used in the meting out of fines and other punishments are given the shape of fantastic little animals, highly imaginative in design.†

The great majority of these various utensils, of course, are not to be taken seriously as works of art, but are interesting only as ethnological specimens, or to show the abounding æsthetic vitality of the people. It does not advance the true appreciation of negro art to admire blindly all of its productions. Great artists are few among the negroes as among all other races, and most of the decorated objects now being exported from Africa in large numbers are not their handiwork. The work of lesser men, there as elsewhere, is characterized by stiff formality, the imitation of forms which were once alive and are now deadened through years of slavish copying.

By far the most important as art of all the objects of negro manufacture are the masks and fetishes. These we shall consider later from the sculptural point of view, and it is well to get in advance

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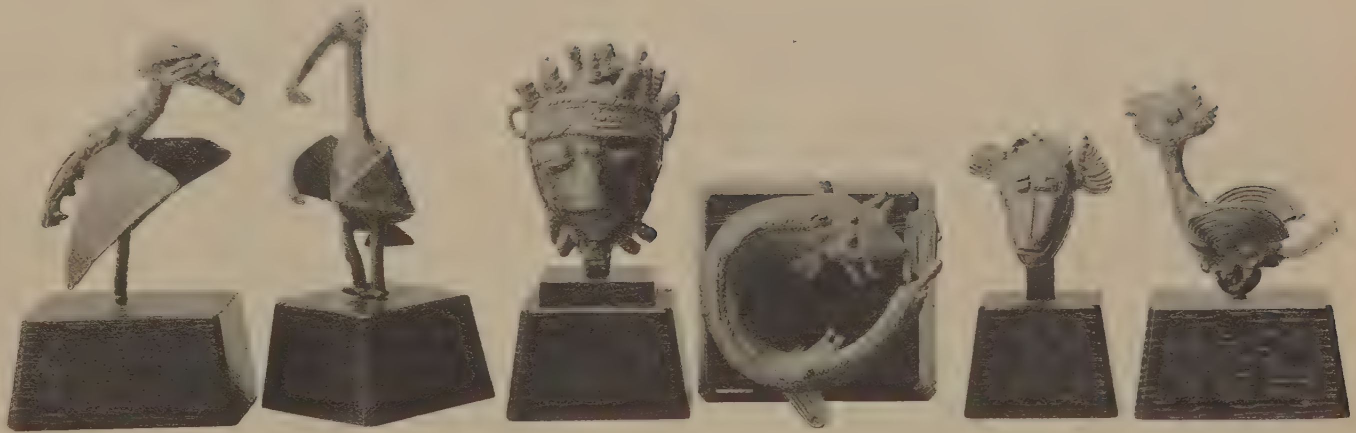
* Figures 3 and 4.

† Figure 5.



5. METAL WEIGHTS

some idea of their functions in the life of the people. No less than the common utensils, they are utilitarian in purpose, directed toward some practical end in warfare, magic or ceremony. "Art for art's sake" is unknown. They are not made in play, or in response to a pure impulse to create æsthetic forms; but as necessary instruments in the social and religious life of the tribe. We must be reluctant to attribute the form of a mask or statue entirely to its social environment, although even here some connections may be guessed at. But to feel the associations which it had for its makers, we must see how it entered into their activities.

One legend of the origin of masks, if not authentic history, shows at least how the people regard them. According to the Bangongo, the wife of an early chief one day left the village to get water. Her child ran after her and refused to go home. In turning to look at him she spilled the water on her head. This happened several times, so the mother hit upon a plan to make the disobedient child stop hindering her work. On the water-gourd she painted a terrible face, and when the child ran after, turned and held it up suddenly. The child cried, "This is not my mother, it is a horrible ghost!" and ran back frightened to the village. Apparently other mothers used this trick, for some time later a secret society decided that it was bad to have boys frightened by women during their childhood. So they forbade the use of masks to women, and decreed that to become a member of their society one must pass an initiation ceremony, in which the nerves of the candidates were tested by masks and blows with a stick.

The use of the mask is very common in Africa, as among many primitive peoples. Various reasons lead to its use. The warrior can use it to frighten his enemies. It is an important part of the equipment of the fetish-maker, a personage of occult powers and great influence in the tribe. By its aid he can transform himself, before an emotional and imaginative people, into an impressive, mysterious and terrible being. He can then talk with spirits and announce their messages with authority; he can accuse some unfortunate of murder, and compel him to undergo the poison ordeal, where to fall for a moment under the poison's influence is a signal for the encircling crowd to leap forward and tear the victim to pieces.

Not all masks, however, are supposed to be terrifying in aspect, for some are connected with the dance, with worship of ancestors and gods, and with other ceremonies of a peaceful nature. Some writers attribute the ritual use of masks to early ceremonies in which the skulls of ancestors were worshipped as sacred relics. At present, they form an essential part of funeral and memorial ceremonies, and of those attendant upon the initiation of young men into adult manhood, or into the various secret societies which play an influential rôle in political and religious affairs. These societies, of which comparatively little is known, often have a membership over a wide area, drawn from aristocratic members of different tribes. Some are restricted to men, others to women. Some practise systematic murder, some ritual sacrifices, animal and human. All cultivate an air of mystery and incantation, with dances and rites at which the everyday personality must be transformed. Not only the wooden mask, as a rule, is worn, but fanciful head-dresses of wicker-work and feathers, fringed beards of straw attached to the masks, and brightly colored dresses with glittering, jingling ornaments. Masks of various types become restricted to particular ceremonies, such as the moon-mask, usually round, smooth and painted white; these various types are more or less fixed by tradition in their general form, although open to considerable variation in detail.

We come now to the fetish figures and other statues of gods, men and animals. The word "fetish" is used in several senses, sometimes broadly, to include masks, charms, amulets, even living animals, trees, certain acts, in fact anything having a magic power. Sometimes it is restricted more narrowly to these carved figurines. It is often hard to tell whether a thing is regarded as having any special magical power. Natives of an artistic bent are constantly carving small figures, either separately or on such utensils as have been mentioned. There exists among several tribes, particularly in the Congo and Sudan, an art of carving portrait-statues in wood. The English explorers Joyce and Torday found among the Bushongo several figures of chiefs, the earliest of which could be dated with confidence about 1600, all representing certain men still known and reverenced by name. They are individualized in feature, and evidently intended as realistic portraits, although altered in accordance with artistic conventions. Such royal portraits are often similar to the more imaginative fetishes representing gods, and this is but natural, since religion and reverence for ancestors of the chiefs are so closely connected. There may be no difference between an ordinary figure and a magical fetish, except that the latter has been rubbed with magic clay, subjected to certain incantations, or made by the official fetish-maker, who alone has the power to endow them with occult efficacy. But many of the finest figures, carved with especial care and closely guarded through centuries, undoubtedly owe their veneration to religious associations.

Many traces of outside religions have by now become indissolubly mixed with the native beliefs, Mohammedanism in the north Sudan and Christianity wherever its missionaries have penetrated. But the native religion of most of the peoples we are considering is a mixture of worship of the dead with animism, the worship of natural forces personified as human or animal spirits. Among the Bantu, who constitute the racial stock of most of the blacks of the Congo, there is generally a belief in a supreme being, creator of everything. He is sometimes conceived as identical with the intelligence that enters into human individuals, as for example a gifted sculptor. However, this god is usually thought of as so high that he has no direct contact with mortals. He has created several subordinate gods, of great power, but not creative. They have commerce with mortals, and can confer their power on humans, animals, rocks, trees and rivers. After the priest discovers by certain rites into what object the spirit has entered, the people worship the object until some sign, such as the falling of a sacred tree, reveals that the spirit has departed.

The fetish of wood, made by humans, is likewise a "god-house," serving some spirit as a place of residence, after certain incantations of the fetish-maker or the believer himself. The native knows that his fetish is not a spirit itself, and regards it as an image in which power has temporarily become lodged through magic rites. Sometimes this power is thought of as dependent upon a necklace or bit of cloth attached to the fetish, so that when deprived of it the image is no longer magical. When a young man sets up a new household, he will go to the fetish-maker to procure himself a fetish, and will thenceforth consult it on all important occasions. He will sacrifice to it and request it to aid him in his undertakings, perhaps driving in a nail or attaching a piece of cloth or skin as a reminder. If the image fails him, he is likely to treat it with scanty reverence, scolding and beating it, or even throwing it bodily into the bushes, to be reinstated after a time. Strangely enough, he is often willing to sell it to a traveling collector or merchant, then procure himself a new one. In cases where a village fetish has been burned or stolen, the natives have continued praying to it in the hut or enclosure where it stood. All these facts indicate perhaps a certain vagueness in the mind of the believer as to the precise nature and whereabouts of the spirit, but seem to indicate definitely that it is something separable from the wooden image in which it may for a time reside.

Ordinarily, the figures are of hard wood, but occasionally of metals, ivory, horn, stone or plaster; rarely of glazed earth. Those of wood may be of that substance alone, and in that case such details as tattooing, neck-ornaments, coiffures, clothes, etc., will be rendered in wood. But the artist, especially in the Congo, does not hesitate to add accessories of other materials: metal rings, garments and the like. He may paint the surface in white or brilliant colors, far from naturalistic. He is especially fond of giving a flashing regard to the eyes by inserting beads, shells, stones or bits of metal. In the belly is sometimes inserted a mirror, plastered on with clay. The theme of the artisan may be a human figure, an animal or a monstrous combination of the two. Details may be emphasized that are associated with a particular god or ceremony; the genital organs, for example, are emphasized, as among most primitive peoples, in subjects relating to fertility and the continuation of tribal descent. Various ritual acts, such as the sounding of a sacred friction-drum, are also favorite themes. In details, one can often detect significant natural facts as the artist's point of departure: tattooed insignia, or physical characteristics of the tribe. Peculiarities such as hydrocephaly may be explained by reference to legends and traditions in which these characteristics figured; extreme emaciation and the representation in exaggerated form of certain diseases (such as dysentery) are sometimes intended to ward off these evils. But all these details are merely themes and starting-points for the artist's creation, and often one must give no significance to a certain characteristic in the statue beyond the sculptor's feeling of its plastic fitness. To this æsthetic, rather than ethnological, aspect of negro sculpture we shall now turn.

CHAPTER II

ITS ARTISTIC QUALITIES

1. *How a Negro Statue Differs from Others*

IN MOST of the sculpture that is popular today, the artist relies on certain kinds of appeal that are lacking, or almost lacking, in the art of the negro. Anyone who looks at the latter expecting to find these same sources of enjoyment is sure to be disappointed. Therefore it is important to remember what not to expect, as well as what positive qualities to look for.

In statues like the Venus de Milo or the Apollo Belvedere, one may see concretely an ideal of perfect human form, graceful, athletic, such as most people would like to be, or perhaps to possess in love. These statues are the imaginary realization of one's desires, and therefore pleasant to look upon. A negro statue is obviously not that: certainly not to a European, and probably not to the primitive negro himself. In flesh and blood, a person so shaped would be a freakish monstrosity.

The Greek statue may also suggest to us beautiful myths that we have read as children, full of interest and imagery, and perhaps of moral ideas that we admire. That of the negro has no such associations; unless one has traveled in Africa or read its folklore, it will probably suggest only the benighted heathen, the wild, naked savage in the woods, and thoughts of cruelty, lust and ignorance.

Houdon's familiar portrait head of Voltaire may move us in another way: not only does the thought of the man arouse our admiration or hatred, as the case may be; the shrewd, whimsical smile itself is infectious, though one had never heard of Voltaire; one feels like smiling in sympathy with him. Likewise the great straining muscles of Michel Angelo's Slave make one feel a sympathetic strain, along with a sense of power, as if one were a mighty being engaged in a Titanic struggle. Again, negro sculpture usually fails to give us these sensations. There is little expression in the faces that one could imitate, or would enjoy imitating; there is little action, emotion, character, incident or story to be discerned.

But there are some additional qualities in our favorite statues that please us, even if we are not conscious of them; at least, if they were not there we might like the statues as a whole somewhat less. For example, it is pleasant to follow with one's eyes the graceful flowing lines of Greek drapery, the alternate swellings and hollows of smooth surfaces. We feel somehow comfortable in looking at the firm equilibrium of the masses constituting the parts of the body; they are not lopsided, do not threaten to fall over. The elbow and the knee may be bent into similar angles, and from that repetition of form we get a vague sense of fitness; the posture is interesting; the limbs are arranged in a simple sort of design.

Not everyone, perhaps, notices or would enjoy noticing such things in a statue. But some people do, and if so they are getting a sort of pleasure different from the other sorts mentioned above. They could get it without knowing what man or god the statue represented, who made it, or any stories connected with it. They would get it from the lines, surfaces and masses, irrespective of whether these forms represented a smiling philosopher, a struggling slave or a stately goddess.

Whether one sort of pleasure is any better than the other is a question we need not raise here. It is not unlikely, however, that one sort would tend to interfere with the other, since dwelling much on thoughts of the subject represented is apt to prevent one from observing the relations between the parts of the statue itself. The figure might even give one two opposite feelings at once; dislike of the subject and pleasure at the form of the statue itself; joy at a happy face depicted and disapproval of the sculptor's technique. If one could not distinguish the specific origin of each feeling, one might be confused and vaguely troubled. Therefore it is well to be able to distinguish the various qualities a statue may have, including its purely plastic ones.

If negro sculpture is to be enjoyed at all, it will probably be through its plastic effects. In other ways it is apt to be unmeaning or even disagreeable to civilized people. But in shapes and designs of line, plane and mass, it has achieved a variety of striking effects that few if any other types of sculpture have equaled. These effects would be impossible in a representation of the human figure if natural proportions were strictly adhered to. They would be impossible in an ideal figure conceived, like the Greek ones mentioned, on a basis of what would be humanly desirable in flesh and blood; * we do not admire bizarre, unusual formations in an actual human body. They can be attained only by abandoning both these considerations utterly and freely distorting the natural shape of the body into arbitrary forms, emphasizing and enlarging here, diminishing there, rounding, flattening or elongating at will.

Any observer can see at once that a negro statue is far from both nature and the human ideal. But he is likely to be incapable, at first sight, of perceiving clearly its designs, since European traditions have not tended to develop sensitivity to sculptural design. If so, the distortions will appear to him purposeless, mere failures to achieve the results he expects. Once let him learn to detect the plastic relations, and the distortions will appear as necessary in their interest. His habits of preference may have become so fixed that no design will be enough to compensate for the damage to both natural and ideal human proportions. But it is the experience of many, who were

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* This does not apply to all Greek sculpture, some of which, especially the archaic, involves considerable distortion for the sake of design.

at first displeased by negro distortions, that the extraordinary power of its designs not only makes up for this displeasure, but obviates it entirely. One comes to regard the statue not as a distorted copy of a human body, but as a new creation in itself, recalling the human form in a general way, but independently justified by its own internal logic, by the necessity and harmony of its parts. Enjoyment then comes not from imaginary wish-fulfillment, from the attempt to envisage some absent and beautiful reality through the medium of an incomplete representation. The sufficient reality itself is at hand, possessed as completely as any object can be, as one possesses music and becomes absorbed in it. To the eye, to the hand, to both together moving over the surface, the statue is like music in its succession of repeated and contrasting sensuous forms, its continuities and subtle alterations of a theme. Or rather it is the material for music that one may compose at will, proceeding always in a new order from line to line and mass to mass, singling out and reorganizing the elements, perceiving always some new relationship that had never presented itself before.

To enjoy a statue in this way comes only with experience and a determined open-mindedness to new sensations. No one who has followed the arts at all, or even reflected on his everyday experience, can have failed to notice that some things which first seem ugly come to be pleasing on further acquaintance. Unfortunately, though, habits and standards of beauty tend to become fixed, so that unaccustomed forms are hard to like, however beautiful they may seem to someone else. A person may have learned to appreciate the plastic qualities of Greek sculpture, in some measure, to follow with delight its flowing curves and smooth surfaces. He may be able to perceive some of the plastic qualities of the African fetish also, yet be only repelled by them, and bewildered by the profusion of its irregular designs. He will find, occasionally, a curve or plane as pure and graceful as the Greek he admires, but it will be mixed in with others radically different, with rough, jagged, unsymmetrical, bristling or swollen shapes, with abrupt and apparently unrelated transitions. He may never come to enjoy the latter; there are many whose tastes remain limited to a few forms, and who go through life quite happy and satisfied with them. But if he can learn to tolerate and even like these shocks, if he can feel stark force in what first seemed to be mere crudity of execution, he will have done in sculpture something like learning to enjoy a new kind of music, like accustoming oneself to new dissonances, to new irregular rhythms, the unfamiliar clash of contrasting instruments. He will have multiplied his range of enjoyments, and will return to find the endless repetition of a few Greek motives in conventional modern sculpture as banal as a popular love-song, repeating for the millionth time stale melodies and hackneyed phrases that once were fresh and appealing.

2. *Design in Sculpture; the Principles of Negro Art*

NOT only music, but any other art that achieves unity of design, organization, does so by repeating a theme or themes, in such a manner that the appreciator can detect a similarity between the parts. It avoids monotony and achieves interest, richness, surprise, by varying and contrasting its themes. The themes may be melodies and chord progressions, color combinations, human motives in conduct, or columns and gables in a building; all of these are capable of being repeated, varied and contrasted, woven into an integral form. The worker in an art, then, if he desires to exploit its possibilities to the utmost, will inquire what are the qualities of the medium he is working in, and what themes and combinations he can make of it.

The materials used in sculpture are obviously distinguished from those of most other arts (except architecture) by their *three-dimensional volume;* they exist in solid blocks, masses capable of assuming various shapes, whose aspects change according to the point of view. Various surfaces, planes, projections and hollows meet the eye, each differently shadowed, bounded by contours, capable of being traced with surface lines in the shape of grooves and ridges, and even of being colored. These are the means at the disposal of the sculptor. While less subtle and delicate than some other media, they can be made into a wealth of simple and powerful designs.

Most schools of sculpture have confined themselves to a few favorite themes of line and surface, repeated endlessly, with little feeling for masses. To secure interest they often rely, as we have just seen, upon the associative power of the subject represented, a confusing and precarious appeal at best. But the negro artist, in concentrating upon unrestrained variety and directness of three-dimensional effects, goes directly to the heart of his problem, and thus realizes the distinctive potentialities of sculpture.*

Every part in a typical, fully realized negro statue functions as an element in plastic design: an embodiment, a repetition in rhythmic, varied sequence, of some theme in mass, line or surface. To be transformed into a design, the human figure must be regarded in a way quite different from that of ordinary life and of most sculpture. It must not be seen as an inviolable whole, treated as one unit and merely posed in this attitude or that. The figure must be *dissociated into its parts*, regarded as an aggregate of distinct units: the head, limbs, breasts, trunk and so on, each by itself. So distinguished and usually marked off by a surrounding groove or hollow, each part can be moulded into a variation of some chosen theme—a sharp, slender projection, or perhaps a smooth, bulbous swelling—never exactly the same as its neighbors, for that would be monotonous; never too far

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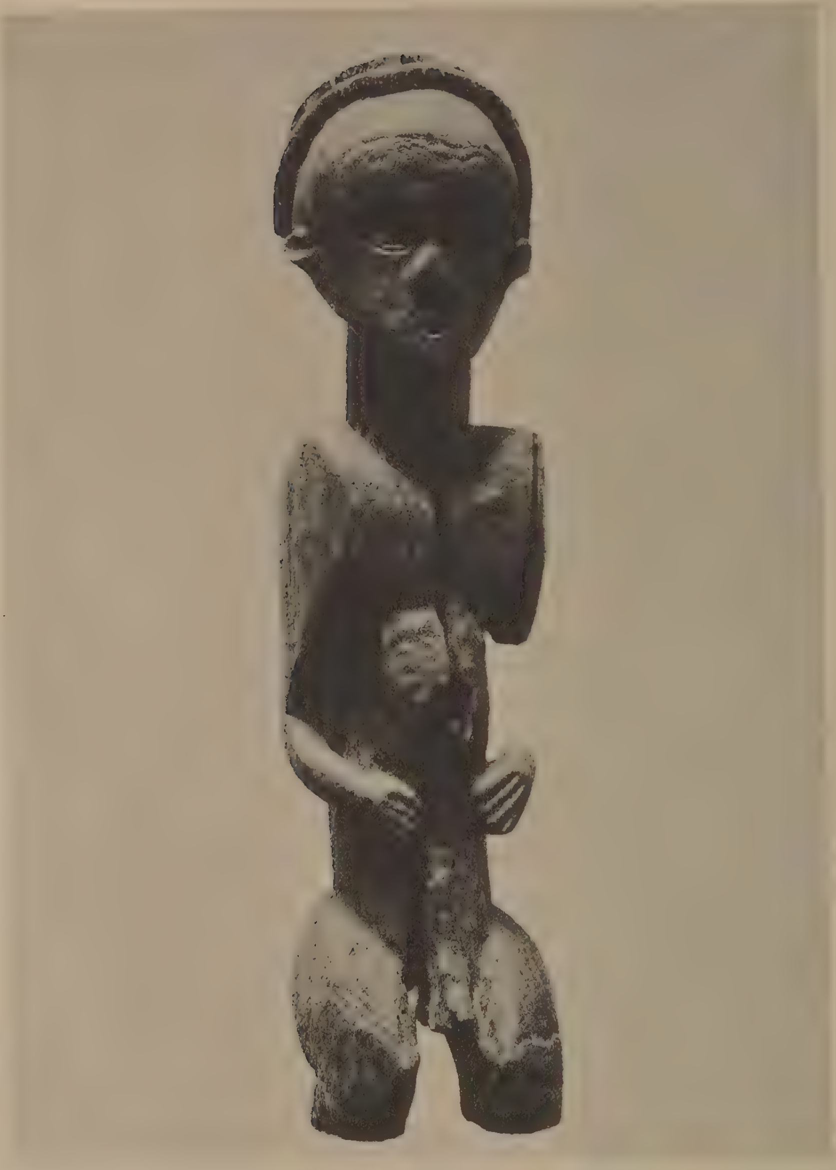
* It is perhaps of some significance that his usual medium is wood. Soft and easily worked, requiring no long, laborious chiseling, capable of delicate as well as massive effects, it is far more responsive than hard stone to the free play of impulsive feeling.



6. CONGO FETISH

from nature, or completely abstract, for that would destroy its interest as representation, its relevancy to the world of human experience. In the same figure an artist may introduce two or more radically different shapes, perhaps repeating and slightly varying each one. Such contrast gives, as in music, an arresting and interesting shock to the observer. It carries with it a possible loss of unity; the whole piece may seem to fall apart, to be confusingly unrelated. Then the genius of the artist consists in finding means to weld the contrasting themes together by some note common to both.

Constructed like a building of solid blocks, a typical negro statue is itself a solid, a full, substantial block, set with convincing, massive realty in its own space. Its effect does not depend, as that of much other sculpture does, on elaborate superficial decoration scratched upon a weak and vaguely realized mass. There is rarely a sense of overdecoration or pretense, a feeling of inner rottenness, as though one could squash the whole fabric between the hands, or scrape off its ornaments at a stroke. Surface decorations there may be in profusion, but they are based upon a firm foundation and integrated with it, to form an unyielding and immovable structure.

Genuine three-dimensionality in a statue implies also that instead of presenting only one aspect, as a painting does, it presents an infinity of aspects and patterns, depending on the point of observation, and on the varying play of lights and shadows. In a negro figure the block is conceived as a whole, not as a cluster of separate bas-reliefs placed back to back and loosely integrated. Occasionally, it may be intended to be backed up against a wall or post, and seen only from the front; if so, the back will be comparatively simple and uninteresting. But the majority are fit to be looked at from all sides, since due attention is given to every aspect of every part, and to the interest of the design as seen from every point of view. As one walks around such a statue, its lines and masses flow constantly and infinitely into new designs and equilibria, with no hiatus or weak interval between.

3. *The Mask as a Sculptural Design*

In making a mask, certain practical requirements limit the sculptor in range of plastic means, more than in the case of a complete figure. He has only the face for a theme, instead of the whole body, and must therefore make up his design from fewer elements. He cannot go very far from natural size, for the mask is usually intended to be worn. He cannot attain full three-dimensionality, for the mask is to be looked at chiefly from in front, the wearer's own head constituting the back and sides, or else an artificial head-dress of straw, feathers and cloths.

The negro mask is not, however, a merely flat two-dimensional thing, but rather a high relief. In some cases it is continued back on sides, top and bottom until just room enough is left at the back for entrance of the head.* In most cases, however, the sculptor accepts the limitation of a single convex surface to be moulded into relief. Sometimes four of such faces are fastened together in a hollow square, the wearer's head inside, so that there is a face looking in every direction. This usually gives the effect of a group of two-dimensional objects, rather than of a single solid. But within his limits the artist tries to achieve as many as possible of the effects of solidity. The face presents many different aspects from different points of view between front and profile. Slight changes in viewpoint, or in the direction and intensity of the light, produce changes which would not be possible in a painting, moving the shadows and bringing various planes and hollows into prominence.

The other limitations mentioned also fail to keep the negro mask-maker from achieving great variety of effects. His practical and re-

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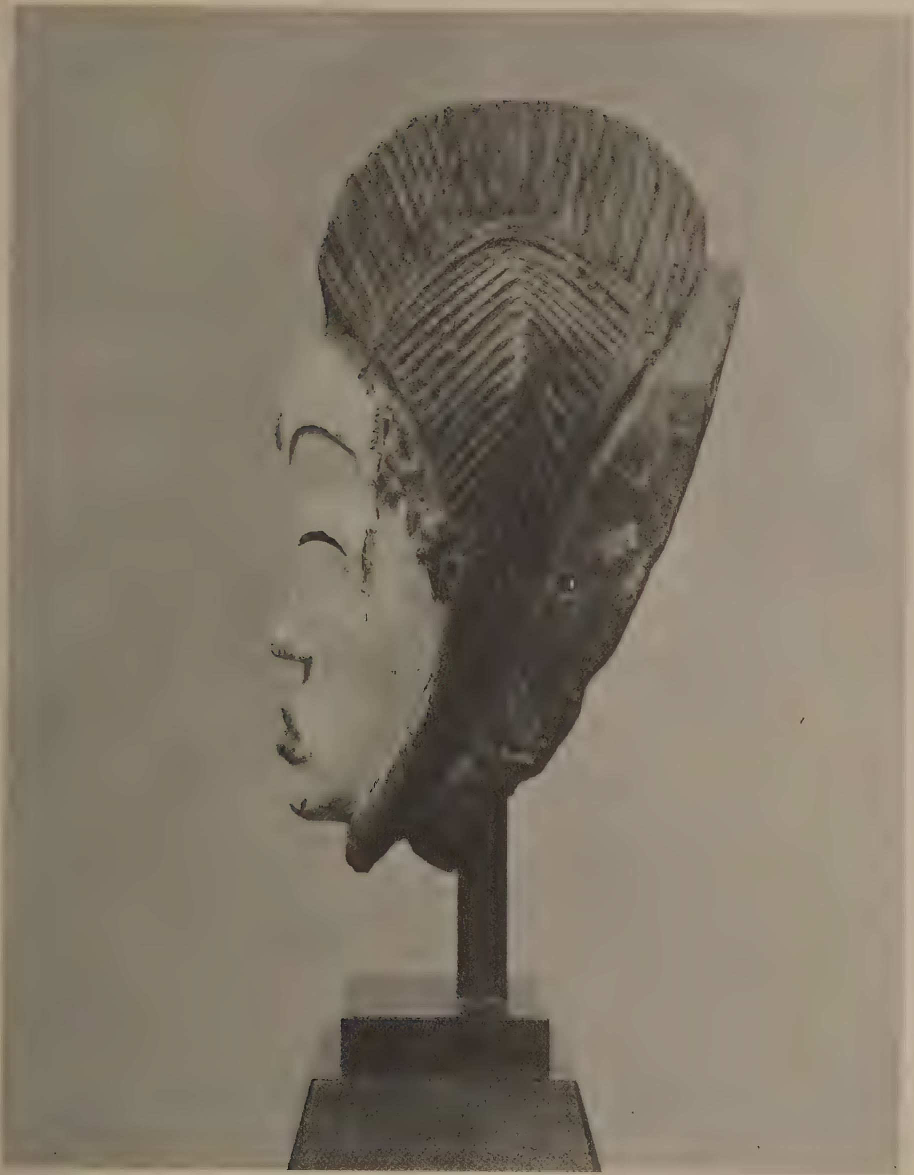
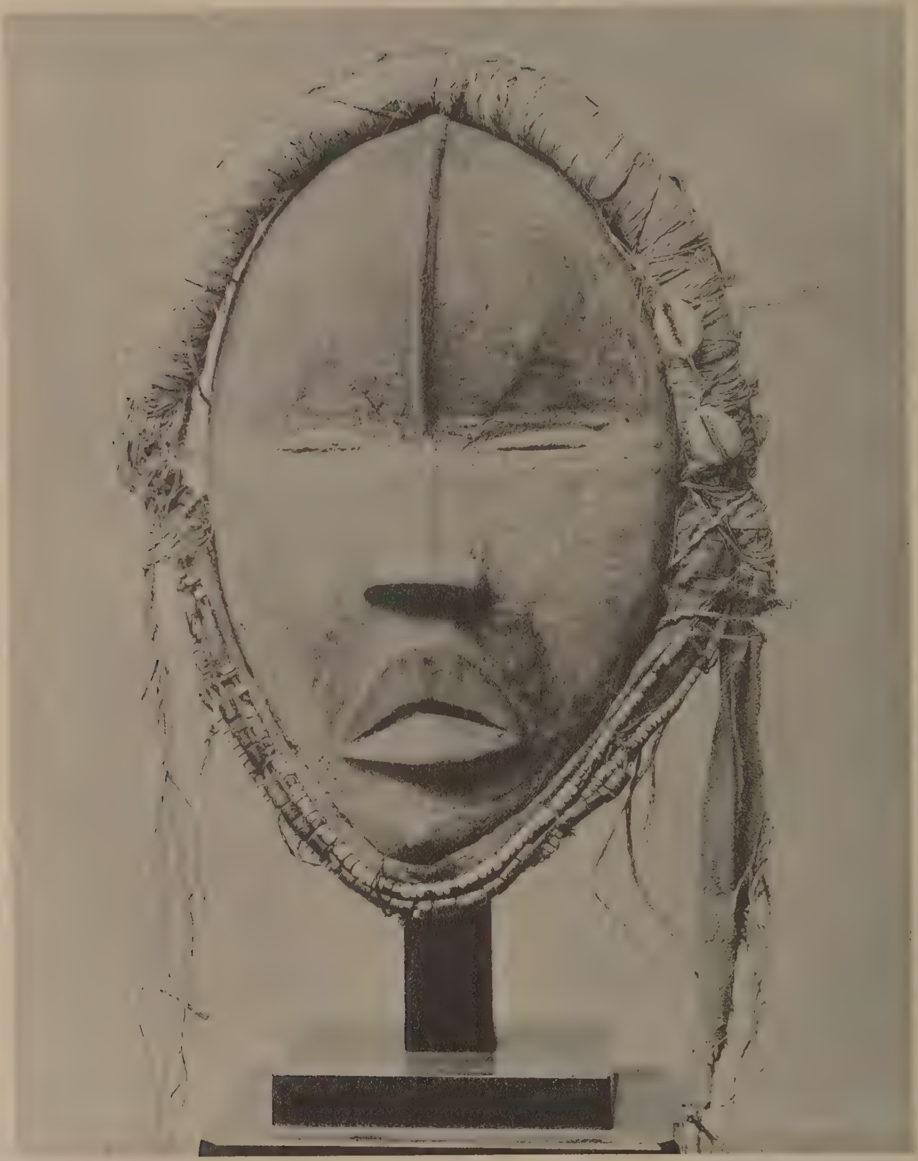
* See figure 7.



7. M'PONGWE MASK



8. IVORY COAST MASK

ligious problem is to produce a face conforming to the tribal concept of a particular deity, or to the traditional rules regarding the type of mask to be worn in a certain ceremony. His plastic problem is to produce, within these limitations, a design out of a few given elements. These are the convex plane of the face, the eyes, nose and mouth upon it, and if he wishes, the ears, front hair, and tattoo marks. He may also add accessory ornament either carved in the same piece or fastened on, such as a festoon of straw and beads.* If the mask is of an animal he may use horns, sharp teeth, etc. In certain cases he may paint the mask in white or in bright colors. Of these few elements he must construct a design.

Tradition cuts him off from two other possible ways of achieving variety and emotional appeal. In neither mask nor fetish, apparently, may he make use of realistic individual variations of feature, as a portrait does; he must not represent in detail special emotions. Almost all negro masks are generalized in feature, simplified, regular, not individual or suggestive of personal idiosyncrasies. In negro masks, unlike those of most other peoples, there is rarely an emphasis on exaggerated facial expression. What little exists is probably in large part an incidental outcome of the arrangement of the features in certain patterns, rather than a direct and major aim of the artist. A downward curve to the mouth, for example, may be determined not so much by the sculptor's desire to portray sorrow, as by his desire to parallel another downward curve in the forehead, and thus pursue a plastic theme. There is just enough expression to relate the faces with sentient human experience, never to approach melodrama.

In a living human face, an eye is an eye, a mouth a mouth; each part has its own distinctive form, and one seldom thinks of it as resembling another part. There may be in the mouth a curve resembling that of the eyebrow. But there are so many other curves in each, so many differences in color, material and shape, that the resemblance is apt to pass unnoticed. Physiologically, the features are combined in the same head, but in terms of design they are not unified, since no common form of line and plane recurs distinctly in one after another; instead, whatever recurrence may exist is overwhelmed by other conformations that are irrelevant to it. The negro mask-maker, like every creator of a design, selects from the given data to emphasize a certain recurrence, and eliminates whatever would not fit in with it. He will freely distort both mouth and eyebrow so as to make this similarity evident, omitting the other curves in both. In so doing he makes a new form, which is not a copy of a face but a new creation, of interest in itself over and above its human associations.

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* See figure 8.

He will bring, likewise, other pairs or groups of features into formal relationship with each other, by making them similar or definitely contrasting in size, shape or outline, by changing their position, or by omitting nearby details so that the observer sees them together. Thus protuberances such as nose and ears may be made similar, though not as a rule quite identical in shape, since this would be monotonous. Forehead, cheeks and chin may be made to reveal the same plane, flat, convex or concave. Instead of repeating exactly, one feature may reverse that of another; the cheek may sink inward the same distance that the forehead swells out; the upward curve of a mouth may be answered by a downward curve, of equivalent size and shape, in the eyebrow. Such pairs or groups of relations will be related to other groups in the face; a single curve or angle, a single gentle undulation, may pervade the whole. Or different motives may be combined, as in the fetish-statue, some of the features reduced to billowing curves and others to angular flatness. Thus the entire face becomes an organic whole in which contrasting elements are harmonized, in whch lines and planes echo and reverse one another, flowing or sharply jutting together to form a closely interwoven whole.

4. *The Perception of Sculptural Form*

In the next chapter a number of typical masks and statues are analyzed in detail, with the belief that they will help the reader to enjoy and appreciate negro sculpture for its own sake, and perhaps other kinds of sculpture as well. To follow them through will require a little effort of attention, in looking back and forth from illustration to analysis, to find in the picture what is said to be there. But unless this effort is made, much of what has been said about the qualities of negro sculpture is sure to remain abstract and unconvincing. The analyses do not consist of theories or involved reasoning; they simply point out in detail certain particular designs, and effects of line, surface and mass. In that way the reader will be able to see concretely embodied the qualities discussed in the previous chapter.

Few people make the effort to see clearly just what is in a statue or a picture. They take a sweeping glimpse of it, experience a vague feeling of like or dislike, dream a little about the subject represented, and pass on. But no design can be really appreciated unless one sees how its parts fit together; otherwise it is merely a blur, a shapeless mass. One cannot feel and enjoy any effect of rhythm or contrast in a work of art without noticing it specifically, distinguishing it from other things that are present at the same time.

There is often a certain pleasure in looking at a thing vaguely, all at once, without trying to analyze it. There is even a thrill of mystery about a thing we do not understand, which moves us unaccountably; and sometimes we fear to drag it into daylight and pick it apart. One who feels the exotic fascination of African art may perhaps hesitate about following these cold, dry analyses; one who likes it not at all at first sight has of course nothing to lose by a further attempt.

This is not the place for a discussion of the value of reason in art, but the fear of it is so widespread, and so justified in many cases, that a word of explanation is not out of place. Understanding does tend to destroy the mysterious thrill of unknown and unfamiliar things, but this thrill is just as apt to be one of repulsion as of fascination; understanding means piercing the fog and seeing just what there is to like or dislike. Moreover, the real mystery of art and of all beauty only grows under inspection: why and how it is that certain forms, rhythms, musical chords, colors, can produce in us the profound and distinctive emotions they do.

There is one kind of reasoning about art that may easily destroy emotional appreciation: the kind that tries to set up arbitrary standards of beauty. It argues on moral, religious or metaphysical grounds, or by invoking the prestige of some respected tradition, such as the Greek, that there are fixed laws and criteria of good art, that everyone ought to like a certain kind and no other. Such theories can arouse only a grudging and insincere respect, meanwhile perplexing and obstructing spontaneous impulses. Nothing can justify art as good except its power of giving pleasure to someone, of satisfying and fulfilling the natural æsthetic impulses of a human being. If a person cannot get this pleasure from a negro statue, after giving a fair amount of open-minded reception to its qualities, there is no reason for him to pretend to like it; he is simply not so constituted; for him it is not good art, whatever it may be for others. But, as has been said before, one's native powers of enjoyment are often undeveloped or narrowed by habit and prejudice; some effort may be required to make oneself genuinely open-minded and receptive, to perceive distinctly the sights and sounds that are coming to him. Analysis that is devoted simply to pointing out the forms that exist in a work of art can never diminish enjoyment of them. It may seem to do so temporarily, while one is engaged in the drudgery of learning to see, feel and respond to new stimuli, as in learning to play the piano, or to read a new language. To follow through the analyses given here will not be delightful in itself; everything is named and listed too methodically, in order to make it clear. Enjoyment comes after such a study, when one can dispense with names and lists, see and feel plastic forms directly and easily.

It may be distinctly harmful to appreciation to read, in the presence of a work of art, a miscellaneous collection of facts associated with it. Many works on art, and a few on negro sculpture, have commented on specific illustrations. But instead of analyzing the plastic qualities of the object, they mention irrelevant facts: its religious and historical associations, its rarity and market value, and the like. No book on sculpture, and only one on painting,* has attempted to analyze in detail, without reliance on historical and literary associations, the plastic qualities of specific works of art. To do so implies not merely describing the objects in a general way, as to size, shape, color, material, etc., but pointing out specific relations between their parts, how they fit together to form designs, major and subordinate, how they repeat one another rhythmically, are varied and contrasted.

In concentrating attention upon the design of a statue, one is dealing with something comparatively real, concrete and objective, and avoiding the fog of associations that confuse most people's experience of art. The qualities of a design are of course not purely objective; they depend on the observer's power of perceiving relations of continuity, resemblance and contrast between visible things. He must be able to select and organize, to disregard some parts for the moment, to notice only the resemblance between several distant parts and the pattern they form; to follow a curve with the eye, to feel a series of similar lines, planes or masses as a rhythmic succession. But the qualities so perceived are comparatively objective in the sense that they are derived from immediate sensory experience, visual and tactile; their existence can be verified through repeated observation by oneself and others. Whether a certain groove or set of projections outlines a triangle, whether that triangle is repeated elsewhere on the figure, is a problem capable of being answered beyond much doubt; one has only to look and see. Based on such perception, æsthetic feeling toward an object is firmly grounded, organized and nourished by contact with reality.

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* *The Art in Painting*, by Albert C. Barnes (Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1926).

5. *The Effects of Past Experience and Association*

The analysis given with each picture is not intended, needless to say, to comprise all that an observer may see in the object portrayed, or all the thoughts and feelings it may arouse in him. Each analysis is a brief suggestion, a possible starting-point for what will be, as a whole, for every observer a unique and individual experience. There is nothing fixed or superior about the order in which the various points are mentioned, although it is perhaps wise in general to look first for the main design of masses, the principal themes, then for the details of subordinate masses, lines and surfaces. Each time that one comes back to a work of art, different aspects are sure to present themselves, and lead on to others in a new order. Genuine appreciation is always a positive re-creation, a work of art in itself.

The mere perception of a design, furthermore, is itself but a starting-point in æsthetic experience. Appreciation would be a dry and useless process if it consisted only in noticing, one by one and in combination, such shapes and relations as are listed in these analyses. There would be no value in perceiving these forms if such perception did not have the power to arouse deep and satisfying emotions, beyond mere intellectual recognition. That it does so is a fact of common experience; why and how it does so is a problem which psychology is still far from being able to answer. Some of the effects of a plastic design on consciousness are simple organic responses, present in all human beings, to sensory stimulation, rhythm, balance and the like. But in each individual these responses will have further reverberations, dependent on his peculiar "apperceptive mass," his fund of experience, memories and habits. Some of these further reverberations may in turn be felt in common by people of the same race, epoch or way of life, and be traceable to conditions which shape their characters in a more or less similar mould. A strongly negroid face, for example, will probably not have the same effect upon a white observer that it has upon a negro, ancient or modern.

No modern observer, furthermore, can possibly feel toward a primitive statue as its first possessors did. He cannot begin to understand, or feel, the emotional force of the original religious and historical associations of the subject: the spirits, legends and magical powers it implied, the venerated story of the statue itself as an ancestral treasure, perhaps made under a great king, fought for, lost in war, and recovered again at the cost of many lives. Used to white civilized customs or standards of physical beauty, he cannot even say with assurance whether a certain type of figure, as representation, seemed charming or repellent to primitive eyes, terrible or playfully grotesque, obscene or decorous. A people used to unbridled sensual and emotional life, to handling, caressing, violently seizing and even rending the human body, will not feel toward a statue as does a people that is used to clothing and delicate restraint. To a slight extent these associations may be guessed at through patient research, but one who hopes to recapture in any considerable degree the original associations of the object, its precise emotional aura to the primitive observer, is attempting the impossible. But in regarding the object as plastic form we are, it seems probable, recapturing a part, and the central part, of the experience of all who have come to vital grips with the statue: that of the sculptor himself, the first observer, and the sensitive amateur of any place and time. Perception of the plastic form, along with the immediate æsthetic effect of that perception, is the nucleus in the experience of all, by the simple virtue of their being human, with eyes, a nervous system and an innate susceptibility to the rhythms of line, surface and mass.

In addition to this common element are the infinite untraceable ramifications of thought and feeling which one may experience as a result of being an African of the jungle, a modern New Yorker, or an individual with personal memories all his own. True, a mere casual glance at the statue, with scarcely any perception of its form, may start off profoundly moving reveries. They may be quite as enjoyable in some ways as an appreciation of the statue's form, and in so far they are incontestably good. But they are not enjoyment *of the statue;* they are enjoyment of other ideas and pictures, free-floating in the mind. Without discernment of its form, the statue itself is not seen or appreciated. This discernment, then, is the universal and necessary first step in all genuine appreciation of the object. After it, the process may stop short, or go on along any of countless diverging paths. What it strikes along one of these paths, in a particular mind, may be so arresting as to overwhelm all other phases of the experience. This aspect or association of the object then seems to that observer to be the only truly significant one, and he is apt to be impatient with others who do not see it in the same way. Some negro fetish has called up vividly to his mind, perhaps, a gigantic negro who frightened him as a child. A Gabun head suggests the skull of a shriveled mummy, with sunken, unseeing eyes, some legendary monster, dreaded in childhood, or the apparition of a long-forgotten nightmare. The swollen limbs of another figure remind him shockingly of elephantiasis; the distended or puckered mouths, the sharp teeth on edge, are expressions of pain and cruelty. The pose may be frankly sensual, the bodily organs emphatic and not to be ignored as parts of a design. All these may reawaken in a civilized man disapproved and primitive impulses, a kinship with the savage, fought down and half suppressed, yet still obscurely potent. Feeling their stirring, beneath the inhibition of conscious tastes and standards, he experiences a sickening repulsion, a thrill of fear, and at the same time, perhaps, a strange and inexplicable fascination. Psychoanalytic theories of the unconscious mind have recently emphasized its place in the emotional appeal of art, and it is to be expected that a vigorous primitive art, especially, would have far-reaching effects within the unconscious depths of many civilized minds. Further researches along this line may cast important light on the nature of the æsthetic experience, but at present data are lacking to pursue the hypothesis further.

Aside from these peculiar group and individual associations, a statue has doubtless other associations, by virtue of both subject matter and treatment, which are quite as universal as the enjoyment of plastic rhythms. A negro mask is not simply a design, or simply a face: it is a face made into a design. And part of the effect on an observer is due to the fact that it is a human face, perhaps the most moving of all visible objects, which is transformed in this peculiar way. Persons of every age and environment are accustomed, by the requirements of daily life, to look at faces and their expressions in a certain general way, to look for certain significant qualities in them. We look sometimes to find shapes and sizes of features that are significant of race, nationality or family. Other qualities we may dismiss as mere accidents of individual nature, without much significance. We are accustomed to see the arrangement of features dictated, in real faces and in sculptured ones, by familiar psychological and physiological causes, by movements of the facial muscles in accordance with certain emotional processes. Lips are turned up or down, parted or gathered, eyes narrowed or opened wide, as the inward feeling is that of mirth, sorrow, wonder, and the like. Such arrangement of features we understand and interpret as signs of what is going on behind the face. Mixed or inscrutable expressions, as in Monna Lisa, pique our curiosity because of the difficulty of reading them as symbols of a state of mind, but even these, in ordinary life and art, are comfortably within the pale of human nature; the woman is a comparatively subtle and mystifying one, but she is still a woman, and doubtless to be explained in some one or more of several familiar ways.

In negro sculpture, on the other hand, the sizes, shapes, and mutual relations of the features are dictated by an entirely different rationale—design. The trained observer can perceive them as design, without trying to interpret them as expressions of emotion. But one who looks at a face in negro sculpture as he would an ordinary face (and the habit of doing so in some degree is almost impossible to shake off) is sure to be perplexed and mystified. The features are obviously not meaningless, not chaotic, random. They have an interest, a moving power, that almost anyone must feel, however vaguely, by virtue of their form. They correspond in part to normal expressions of feeling: a mouth is turned down as in sorrow, eyes are narrowed secretively. There is an intangible sense, at times, of stoical resignation, of ferocity, terror, dolefulness, an aloof, mysterious smile, introspective as in the face of Buddha, or grimly fixed as in death. But the correspondence with normal expression is only a partial one: as a whole the effect is not that of any human face. An imaginative observer may easily fancy that the orderly and consistent arrangement of features is, like more familiar arrangements, the expression of a state of mind, but of some inhuman and unearthly one, only partly within the range of human experience. Thus the partly human face may serve as a bridge to lead the observer from an everyday attitude to an awed contemplation of the supernatural. This was actually one of the chief functions of both masks and fetishes, and it is reasonable to suppose that the total experience of the worshipper was somewhat along this line. He was sensitive to plastic form, but not a devotee of art for art's sake; the design was for him inseparably blended with its human and superhuman associations.

Let us take for example the Ivory Coast mask shown as a frontispiece (Fig. 1), and try to imagine its effect on the primitive observer. It is worn by the tribal wizard, the fetish-maker, who advances in full ceremonial panoply before the waiting crowd. He starts a long, crouching dance, a monotonous rhythmic chanting that inflames the crowd to follow, and, after hours of rising ecstasy, to burst with him into a climax of leaping frenzy. What part has the mask in producing this state of excitement? The emotion it contributes may be a simple one, a state of extreme awe and terror; yet if we ask how it produces this effect, we shall find several factors coöperating. In the first place, the solemnity of the occasion, the belief in hovering ghosts and devils, the lurid glow of the fires, have all contributed toward putting the observers in a susceptible state of feeling. In the second place, the sorcerer that wears it, and the magic clay with which the mask is coated, are recognized as having uncanny powers. A mere flat board, given such associations, might cause profound emotion, as a shapeless piece of the "true cross," raised aloft by a priest, may do for the Christian worshipper. But in addition to these factors, the facial expression depicted on the mask operates to cause a feeling of terror by suggestion and sympathy; it has the staring eyes, the stiffly parted lips, with corners turned down, the hair erect, the knitted brow, which are known to be associated with that emotion, all rendered with a stark accentuation that no literal copy of a terrified face could achieve.

Finally, the mask has a direct æsthetic effect, independent of all associations, by the shapes and combinations of its parts. The eyes are rough, irregular circles, boldly outlined; the huge upper lip, as a semicircle, relates the mouth to them and joins in a rhythmic series that is continued above the eyes. The lower lip, a stiff contrasting horizontal, relates the mouth to the base of the nose and to the horizontal lines of the forehead, and thus sets another rhythmic series in motion. The nose, a sharp-edged pyramid, is echoed in the line of rough, ribbed cones of hair that march across the forehead. The vertical ridge above the nose connects it with the hair, bridging an otherwise blank expanse, and helps to balance the heavy massing of features at the bottom. It joins with nose and mouth to form a wedge-shaped subordinate pattern; to right and left of this wedge, as a result, are two shield-shaped planes, each pierced by an eye, and each a smaller version of the face's total contour. These contrasting rhythms affect the sensitive eye and brain as a series of powerful reiterated shocks in line, ridge and roughened hollow, alternated with smoother intervals, like recurring bursts of drums and brasses in music. Distributed, spaced, contrasted, welded firmly together by repetitions of theme, each shape is given its maximum æsthetic effectiveness, and the power of the whole is made cumulative, brought to a focus by the unity of design.

This effect of the mask as plastic form being harsh and violent, it tends to reinforce and accelerate the violent emotions aroused by the mask as expression and as symbol. From the coöperation of such varied stimuli, direct and associated, an intense emotional response would be almost inevitable. The savage, of course, did not stop to distinguish from one another the various meanings and qualities of the mask, but felt them all at once, or with different aspects vaguely coming into the foreground at different times. Which was most important in his total experience it is impossible to say; all were real and vital, and it would be false to suppose him as responding to pure plastic form or to any other single aspect alone.

Nevertheless, for the modern appreciator it may still be wisest to single out and concentrate upon plastic form at the expense of all other aspects. One whose interests lie rather in primitive rituals, dance and music may prefer to think of the mask in its human setting, perhaps to use it in dramatic presentation, thus once more surrounding it with an aura of associated images and ideas. That, too, is enjoyable and worth while in its own way. But the result, for moderns slow to sense plastic form, is usually to obscure and distract from the mask itself, rather than to enhance its appeal. If one's aim be plastic appreciation, a determined ignoring of things non-essential to that aim is necessary, for a time, at least. And as a permanent policy, there is a distinct value in keeping one's attention steady, one's ideas clear and feelings unconfused—the value which many music-lovers miss in opera as a mixed form. To such lovers of purity in emotion, and to anyone that develops a keen appreciation for sculptural design, it is likely that all associated dreams and questionings will come to seem mere confusing interruptions in a visual music that is complete and sufficient in itself.

6. *The Growth of a Primitive Art-form*

IN FOLLOWING a discussion of the principles of negro art, or the analysis of a statue, the reader may be inclined to wonder what relation it all has to the thought of the primitive negroes themselves. Surely they did not work out these elaborate theories of æsthetics, or proceed in this systematic fashion to construct a design. Are we perhaps attributing a great deal of imaginary significance to what was really the mere fumbling and whittling of half-animal savages?

It would be absurd, of course, to suppose that the savage artist reasoned with anything like this amount of explicitness about his own work. We are not trying to think exactly as he did, but to find out what negro art means and can mean in the life of today, in the light of modern art and science. But it is false to assume, on the other hand, that there is no connection between his inarticulate thoughts and our explicit ones. If we are to recover his attitude at all, it can only be through examining his works with every available instrument of research, so as to see what they really are in themselves, and how one may look at them simply and directly without modern preconceptions. A proper use of technical words and concepts should help and not hinder such appreciation.

One can also go too far in denying all rationality to the savage. Though unversed in scientific abstractions, he was in some ways highly reflective and purposeful in his behavior, as anthropologists have recently demonstrated. We know, too, that he distinguished many traditional designs and gave them special names, especially in tattooing and textile-weaving. It is certain that the craft of woodcarving was handed down from generation to generation with many definitely understood rules and methods. They were of course largely empirical, with little attempt to justify them on æsthetic grounds; the native was not aware of his own psychology, or much troubled about the reasons for his likes and dislikes. But there can be no doubt that he knew what he was doing, to a very considerable degree, if not why he did so. The elaborate and firmly organized designs he produced do not come by mere aimless fumbling with a block of wood, or the task of sculpture would be an easy one. He saw and felt their elements clearly, one by one and in relation to each other.

There must have been, however, much less order and plan in the work of production than appears in the finished product. A composer does not write a sonata straight ahead, from the first bar to the last, in the execution of a preconceived plan; he goes back and forth, sees at first vaguely, tries arrangements impulsively, and slowly brings order out of shapelessness. Even to a modern sculptor, an abstract understanding of the principles of design will be of only limited help: his genuinely unique and powerful creations will come forth largely by automatic impulse. Our logical analysis of his finished work is like the analysis a botanist makes of a plant; it never retraces the actual steps of development.

If one desires to imagine how the primitive artist may have gone about his task, there are many facts to assist him. In the first place, it is known that children and savages, untaught artists generally, tend naturally to draw and model in a way not wholly unlike that of negro sculpture. Their spontaneous efforts, that is, are not toward exact representation but toward simplification, generalization, abstraction, along with rhythm and contrast of themes. They do not attempt of their own accord to copy exactly all the visible details of a thing; that comes only with tedious observation and painful technical preparation. The thought never occurs to them, at first, that such a thing would be worth while trying. What is immediately pleasurable is the relatively easy task of drawing or shaping from imagination a rough simplified sketch of some object, or type of object, that has attracted persistent interest: a horse, a tree, or a man with a stick. Such pictures are more or less automatically constructed in the imagination from many memories of the thing as seen on different occasions. The picture is inevitably distorted by the exaggeration of aspects which have attracted special attention, and by the omission or minimizing of others. It tends to become rhythmic from sheer habit and inertia, as well as from conscious preference, since the path of least resistance is always to do again what one has just done before, to repeat a motive over and over. When repeated stimulations become tedious, there is a natural craving for contrast and variation of forms.

Work so produced is not necessarily art. With the ordinary child or savage it begins and ends as mere random scrawling, a disorganized jumble of blurred images. From this to the sophisticated coherence of the Ivory Coast or Gabun is a far cry indeed, a journey requiring not only unusual sensitivity, experience and power of organization, but that added mysterious something which can make a design unique, personal and compelling. It would be illusory to hope that merely by recapturing the naïveté and freedom of childhood one could produce work of the stature of negro art. But in spite of the distance, there is an essential continuity between the spontaneous art of any gifted child and that of the great negro sculptors. By contrast with the artist who aims at literal representation, both are working along similar lines: the selection of significant visible qualities, their recombination into a generalized form, and the æsthetic pleasure that accompanies such a process. It is not hard to imagine, then, the continuous development of negro art out of the free, naïve play of the æsthetic impulse.

In the case of any individual artist, of course, the force of social custom must have been a strong determinant upon his own impulses toward creation. It operated on the primitive mind, not externally, to hold him in, but to shape his inner imagining itself. If suddenly released he would have been powerless, for tradition was his chief instrument for the organizing and interpreting of present experience. He sought no individual fame, so far as we know, nor did he strain, as the modern artist does, after uniqueness, originality; he was content to think, act and carve his fetishes in the way his people had always done. Individualism, in all branches of life, is the product of a complicated civilization: when many traditions are in conflict, the individual, though never entirely free, is more able to choose between them by virtue of his own peculiar endowment. We expect of a civilized man, in art as elsewhere, that he make conscious choices, that he form his own synthesis from past traditions, and we hold it a sign of weakness if he follows any one school too faithfully. But in the primitive tribe there is but one tradition, with few cross-currents, and little stimulus or opportunity for the assertion of a personality.

Some assertion there is sure to be, of course, whether consciously or not, by the active minds of every generation. African sculpture must have had its individual geniuses, for its most powerful creations are unique, each with a characteristic twist that distinguishes it from every other. Here there was no established priesthood, as in Egypt, no codified tradition or entrenched academy to freeze the forms of art for centuries. It lacked the differentiating force of a conscious individualism, but also the crystallizing force of a rigid social order. Its inertia was that of life itself, instinctively conservative, yet impelled unconsciously into new channels of growth. Its conventions, never quite conscious or authoritative, were sufficiently broad and loose to allow an almost innumerable variety of forms.

The local tradition, furthermore, was not wholly an obstacle to individual creation. To some extent, conventions imposed on any artist work as an aid, an inspiration, rather than as a limit to his creative range. Totally unregulated impulses tend to dissipate themselves. For the negro artist, especially, unable to work out abstract, sophisticated theories of artistic value, the local tradition must have been an indispensable steadying, coördinating force, which saved him from the need of groping in utter perplexity. It provided him in advance with certain themes upon which his imagination could take hold, and it directed that imagination along certain broad lines of growth. He started with the idea that the familiar tribal deity was to be portrayed, and in a certain general way. Thus launched on the project, he was on the way to working out new details of treatment.

The creation of an elaborate and perfected statue, then, we must attribute not to any one artist, but to the slow growth of a social concept, with much imitation and a little innovation here and there. In the remote past, the village fetish may have been a mere stick, with holes for eyes and mouth and a cleft for the legs, dressed up with feathers, bits of metal and cloth. By stages infinitesimally small, its successors became more and more detailed, showing other parts of the body, and perhaps the distinctive tribal head-dress. Some general shape, such as thick or slender, rounded or sharp, was repeated in several parts of the figure, as a child repeats a form in his random drawing, partly because such repetitions are attractive, partly, as has been said, from habit and inertia. Why they are attractive in the doing, and, later on, in the seeing, is a question whose answer lies deep in the nature of living processes, in the universal tendency to rhythm which operates in breathing and pulse-beat, and in the tides and seasons.

At first mere fumbling, the process must gradually have become a more conscious one in the minds of later artists. We may imagine one, not necessarily an epoch-making genius, as setting out modestly to carve a new fetish in the old accustomed way. Taking an old one as a model, his eye is caught by a resemblance in shape between some of its parts. He sees, for example, in the curve of the shoulders a repetition of the curve of the hips or in the pointed elbows a resemblance to the knees. But certain other parts of the body bear no resemblance to any of these. Vaguely, he feels the inadequacy, the looseness and lack of interest in these unrelated parts; somehow they do not seem to "go well together." He tries, by accident or intention, changing them a little so as to introduce, or accentuate, the curve that is dominant elsewhere. The rhythm thus produced is immediately satisfying, and likely to be imitated in its turn. It has become a permanent element in the traditional form.

In time there accumulates a considerable number of patterns, variations of the ancestral form, adapted to different subjects and utensils. This opens the way for greater selection and originality. Then the artist, with a new fetish-figure called for and a block of wood before him, can choose deliberately some sanctioned form of line or mass for a theme, and set out to see what can be done with it. His imagination is obsessed, perhaps, by the feeling of rough, abrupt, irregular projections, that stirs his blood like the rhythm of war-drums. In the grip of this rhythm he will force the yielding block into step with it, gouging in the eyes and mouth, leaving the nose and chin to jut out square and massive, or sharply pointed like the points of spears. As he goes down the body the thought of each limb, each natural division of the trunk, incites him to stab the block into new embodiments of that rhythm. Yet, if he is an artist of self-control as well as intensity, he feels at the same time the necessity for restraint, balance, the unity of the whole. So the block is not hacked to jagged pieces, but cut at every point so far and no farther, until the lower mass is equivalent to the upper one, the sequence of angles commenced at the forehead continued without interruption to its firm basis in the short, thick legs and broad feet.* If he is fascinated rather by the flow of curves in the palm branch, the swelling planes of the water-gourd, his block of wood will follow a gentler undulation. The nose and chin, the sharp knees and elbows will melt into roundness, the planes between rise smoothly into hill and valley, with no straight line or angle to jar their progress.

Thus borne along by the rhythm of the life about him, and by the momentum of the past, going a little farther by his individual power, the primitive artist creates a new form, the crystallized expression of his race and of his own personality.

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* Such legs and feet are characteristic of nearly all negro sculpture, in marked contrast to the Greek ideal. They function plastically like the base of a pyramid, to preserve a fundamental stability.

CHAPTER III

ITS CHIEF TRADITIONS

1. *The Problem of Distinguishing Traditional Forms*

ONE who looks for a time at negro sculpture cannot fail to notice, after its first strangeness has passed away, a strong resemblance between many of the pieces. If he looks also at the names of the tribes or places of origin, he will find a few names recurring often on the pieces of highest quality, and on the others a host of local and tribal names of little meaning except to the anthropologist. There is no value at present, for the purpose of appreciation, in going very deeply into this matter of origins, or in being scrupulous about the accuracy of dates or tribal attributions. But the reader will have a much clearer comprehension of the variety of negro forms if he is aware of the main branches and traditions.

The existence of several great traditions in negro art is a fact which is still barely realized, and practically no notice has been made of it in critical writing. But an examination of the chief European and American collections has now made possible a tentative beginning at classification. This work has been based in part upon available information about the origin of particular pieces, and in part upon a comparison of the pieces to single out their essential likenesses and differences.

The choice of names to designate the chief forms depends on the first of these lines of research, and is somewhat doubtful because of the lack of trustworthy information. Often it is impossible to trace the origin and history of a statue. It may have come to Europe through the hands of a colonial official, who may have secured it from an army officer, an explorer, missionary or trader in some river, village or coastal settlement. What was its earlier history no one knows. It may have been captured in war from a neighboring tribe, or carried long distances in some ancient migration. It may have been made in imitation of some other statue so transported. Other pieces may be inferred on fairly trustworthy grounds to have been made and handed down in the tribe that last possessed them. All are sent to Europe with what shreds of information are known, and with the guesses of the sender as to their places of origin. So the European critic gradually forms in his mind a concept of the distinctive qualities of a Gabun or Sudan piece. If a new statue then comes without a label, he feels that by its form he can determine its provenance. Yet the original concept may have been formed from instances some of which were wrongly labeled. Or, if the new piece was influenced by the culture of some tribe other than the one that made it, he may erroneously assign it to the former. Misleading resemblances may occur, by accidental coincidence, between the products of widely separated tribes.

For all these reasons the study of the traditions of negro art labors under difficulties. In spite of all, however, many examples of fairly accredited origin have come to the attention of critics, and items of trustworthy knowledge and belief regarding the various forms are slowly taking shape. Although realizing the uncertainty of some attributions, and of all the descriptions of local forms, we shall therefore present them in the ways that information and experience up to this time suggest as most probable.

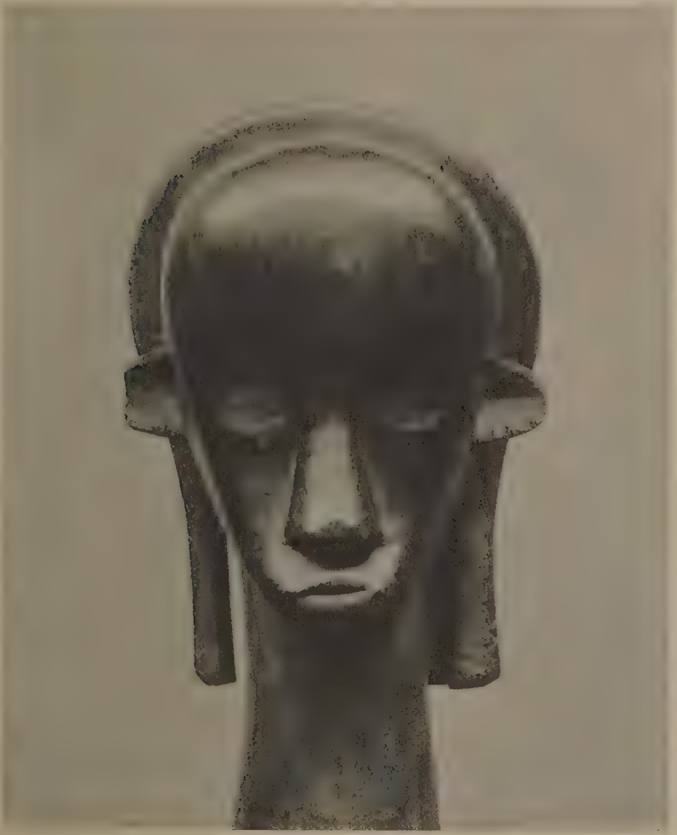
The names of tribes or territories, and the characteristics of their art, will be given very broadly and loosely as a tentative beginning for further research. "Sudan," for instance, is the name of an enormous district, within which many types of culture and of art have flourished. The qualities mentioned as typically Sudanese are not the exclusive and universal qualities of this region, but have been discerned in a considerable number of the objects of artistic merit which are known to have come out of it, and more rarely if ever in the work of other districts. With further knowledge, it is to be expected that all the classifications will be considerably altered as well as elaborated. At present, the more important step is not to relate correctly a particular form with a particular name; it is to find what distinctive traditional forms existed, wherever they may have been produced, and whatever variant forms existed along with them.

With regard to the notes on particular illustrations, it should be said again that, even in terms of plastic design, they are not intended to be complete analyses. Each note is a suggested beginning for a series of experiences which will be different for each observer, and with each observation. They do not follow the same or any consistent method or order. Some are carried into considerable detail, to show that an apparently simple figure may contain many intricate relationships worthy of notice. Some mention only a few qualities of basic importance, others an unusual fact or brief characterization. In all the reader will find it of value to alter and supplement the comments from his own point of view.

2. *Gabun*

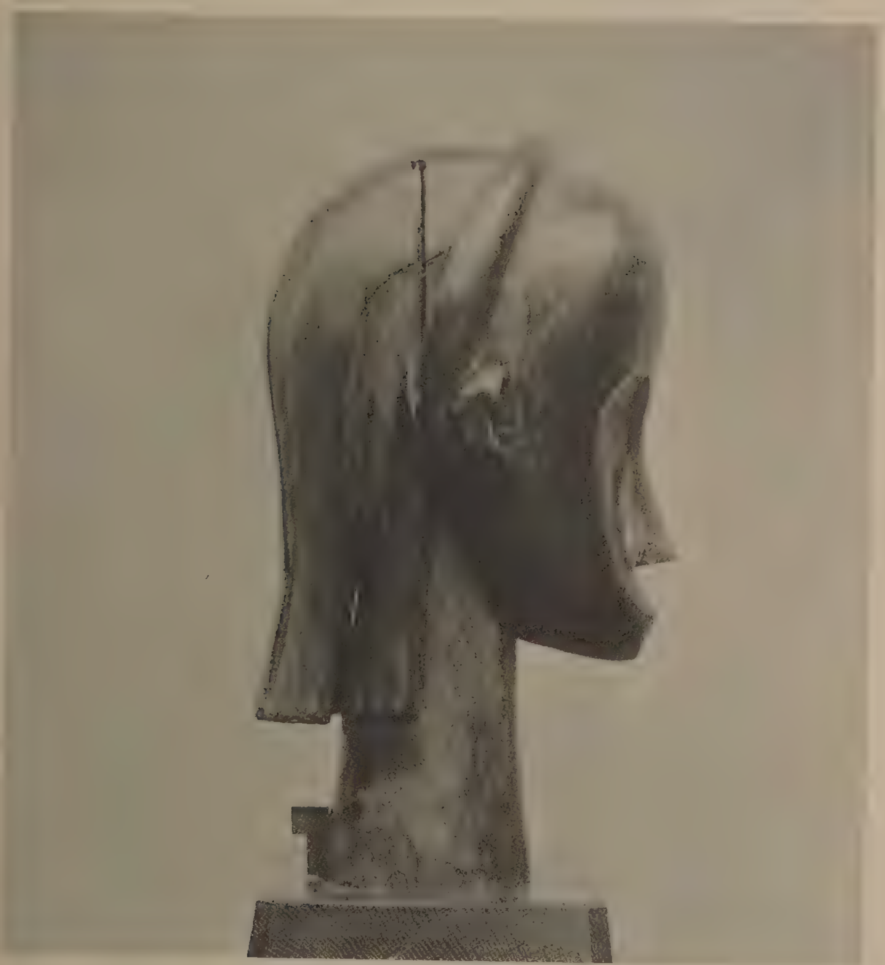
The sculpture of the Fangs or Pahouins, in the Gabun territory, tends toward a bulbous or pear-like shape, or a repetition of such shapes, with a flow of curving planes that rise from hollows into smooth swelling surfaces. It is comparatively plain and simple, lacking in accessory ornament, depending for its effect on the rhythm and contrast of the masses composing its basic structure.

The head in Fig. 9 is Egyptian in its solid, monumental simplicity, yet entirely negro in its particular design. The Gabun form of swelling bulbousness is presented with stark intensity, led up to and accentuated with masterly sureness by the shape and direction of every part. The long, but rigid and powerful neck rises like a tree-trunk into the head, where it is joined by the smaller rods of hair and nose, and the slanting contours of the face. Chin and mouth are diminished until they offer no obstruction; eyes are filled and flattened till the cheek glides smoothly over them; and sweeping upward in the branching curves of nose and eyebrows the whole face bursts into a tremendous domed forehead, full, hard, and inexorably bound down by an arching rope of hair. Some of this bursting force is released at the sides in extended ears; above them the forehead seems to rise by its own power, with all the masses below suspended from it in motionless calm. Between forehead and neck the features are compressed into a symmetrical pattern of small repeated lines, planes and masses about the nose as a center. Mouth and eyes, chin and ears, nose and hair-ropes are a cluster of concentric triangles. In and out, up, down and around the structure the lines and surfaces swell and recede with one perpetual, smooth, restrained and even rhythm.



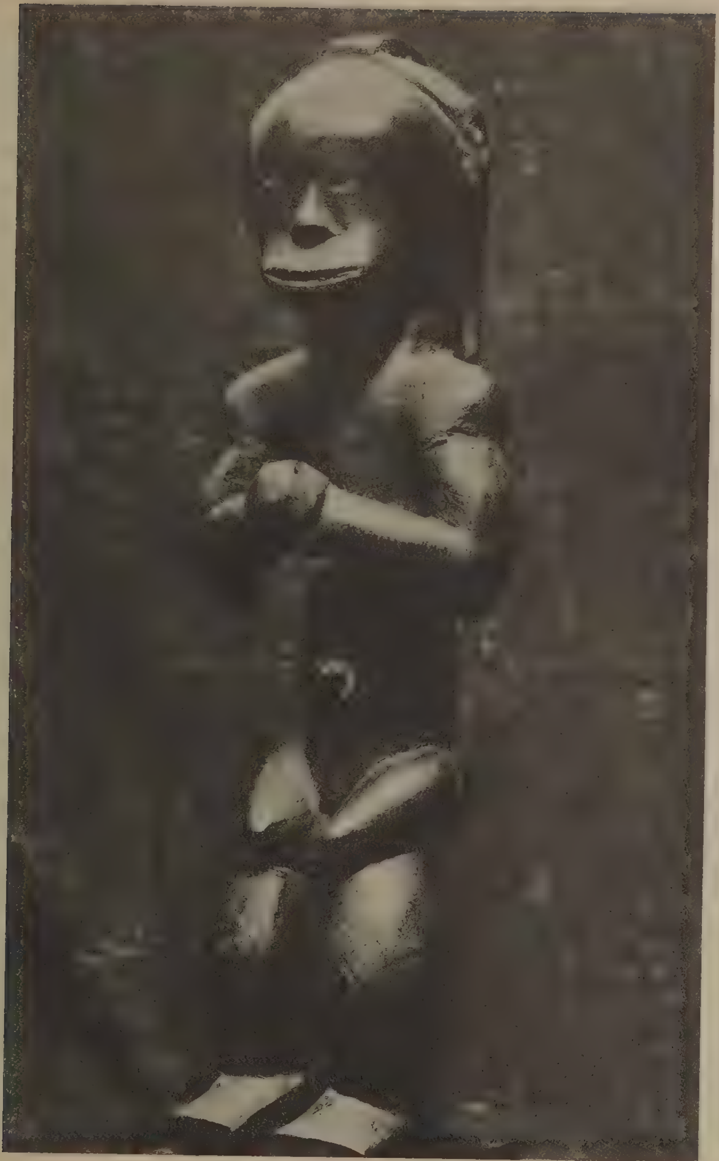
9. GABUN

A side view (Fig. 10), or, better still, a complete encircling of the statue, adds conviction to the sense of solid three-dimensionality, as from every viewpoint the constituent masses fit together in some new majestic structure. From the side the main design is still a bulbous dome, walled in with sweeping curved pilasters, with ridged and hollowed curving planes that repeat and answer each other insistently, held high in the air by the unyielding neck with its rigid angles at the chin and base of head-dress. Monotonous symmetry is daringly destroyed by a wide disparity between the curves at right and left, and by the swerving of the central hair-rope. Yet pervasive rhythms bind the whole together, and each thrusting of a part aside is unerringly corrected elsewhere, till the masses are locked once more in stable equilibrium.



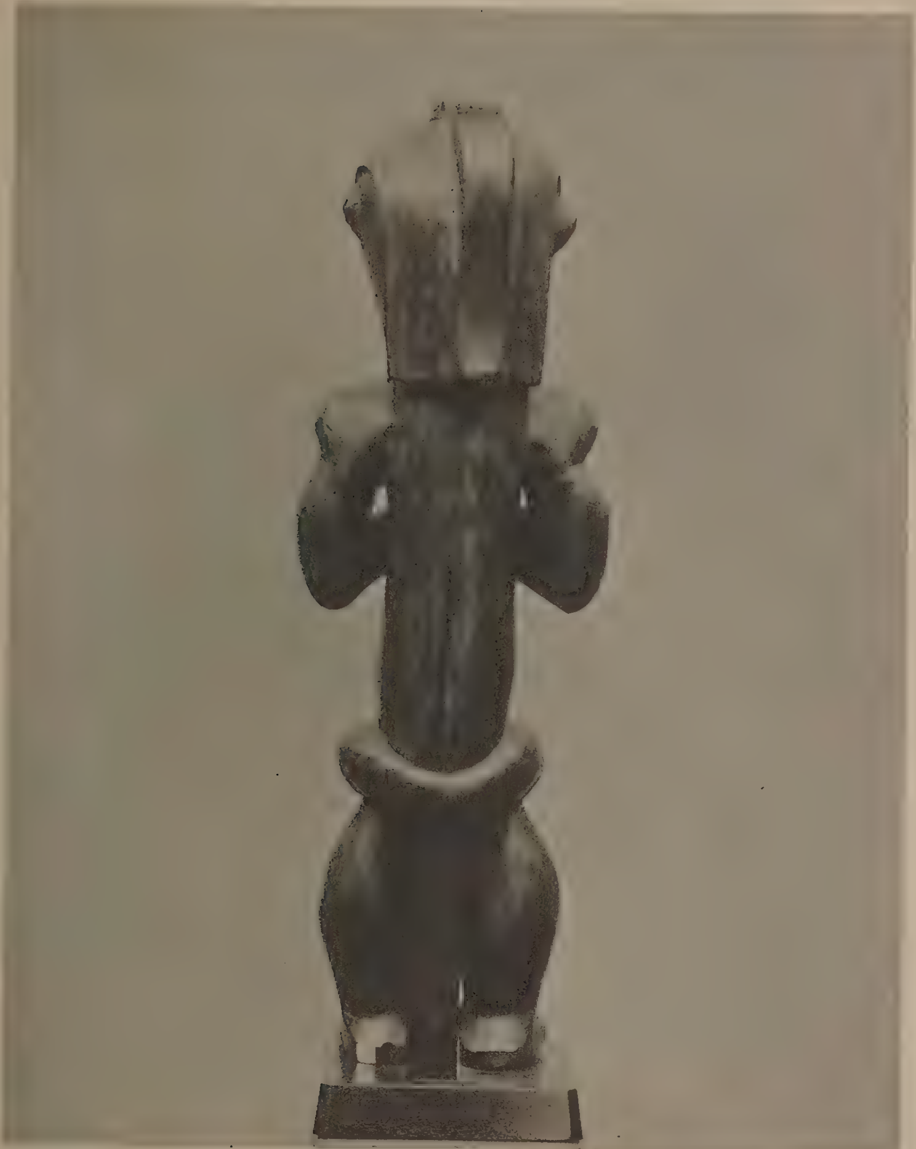
10. GABUN

In the full-length statue (Fig. 11) a more complex design is made by more numerous and varied repetitions of the bulbous motive. Here the rhythm becomes a little sharper, less flowing; there are more and smaller parts, and the swellings drop quickly into deep grooved hollows, to rise and fall again immediately. The grooves function, in the typical negro manner, not only as linear elements in the design, but to dissociate the body into structural units. Each unit retains some likeness to the human limb it represents, yet invites separate attention as a rhythmic repetition of the bulbous theme, now varied almost to a cylinder, now distended almost to a sphere. There are major and subordinate elements in the design; above and below are equivalent spheroidal masses, the head and the pair of distended legs. Both are simplified and emphasized by the minimizing or pushing aside of such details as eyes, ears and thighs. About the long, swelling trunk the arms and thighs are arranged in a symmetrical pattern; the forearms cross an ellipse which begins at the apex of the nose, and thence branches down through the corners of the mouth, through upper arms and thighs to the pointed knees below. From directly in front the head, clenched hands and navel form a descending line of diminishing spheres. The same flat curve is repeated by top of head, shoulders and forearms, and reversed by mouth and thighs. By such recurring rhythms every part is intangibly bound together, across intervening spaces, themselves rhythmic, with every other part.



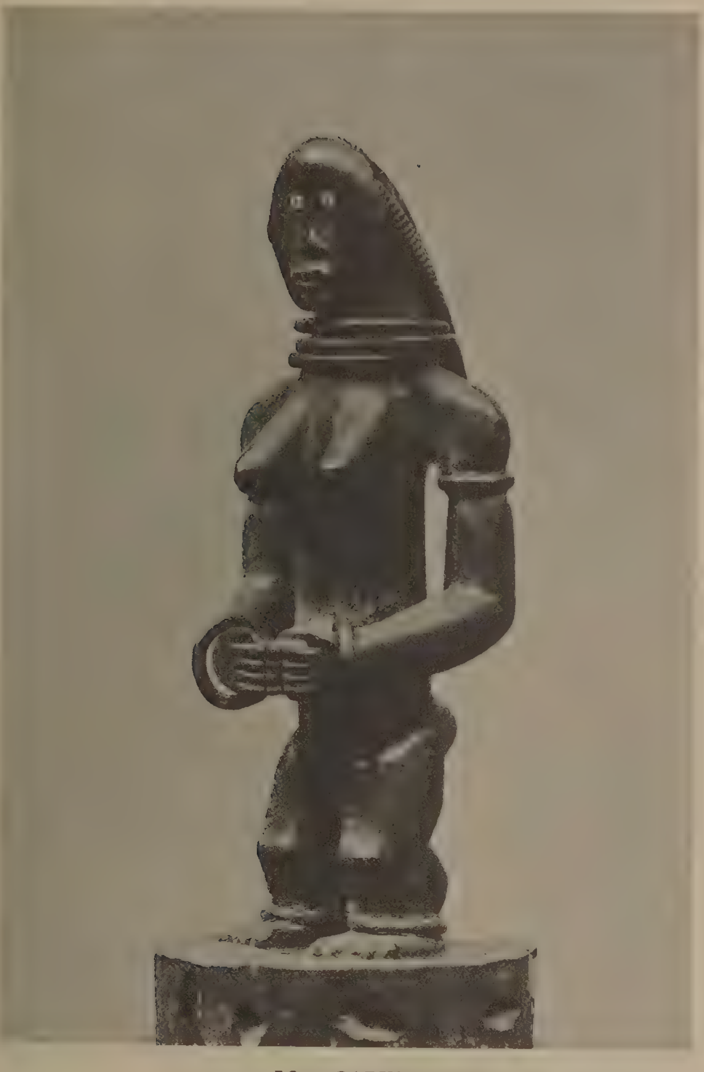
II. GABUN

The back (Fig. 12) is an analogous but simpler arrangement of masses. A vertical groove divides the trunk into halves that function as rhythmic variations of the arms, buttocks and legs. The sections of the head-dress, and the ears, fit into this sequence, but vary it with their flat, square-edged planes. The insistence on a single curve, in contrast with long verticals, makes the basic structure more obvious than in front. From any point of view this figure is compact and monumental, with no irrelevant or unrelated part, yet full of contrast and subtle variation.



12. GABUN

There is less simple firmness, more freedom, contrast and decoration in the Gabun figure next reproduced (Fig. 13). From the side appears the same tendency to groove the parts into rounded masses; but there is less insistence on the pear-shape and sphere, and only a suggestion of Gabun roundness persists in the swollen forehead. Against the static pillar of the trunk, and in sharp contrast to the strangely flattened face, several projections stand out sharply: the long sweeping curve of the head-dress, echoed as a long wide angle in the arms, and in the sharper angle of the thin and stiffly protruding breasts. The violent rhythm thus set in motion trembles and diminishes through the smaller curves and points of hips and legs to a firm conclusion in the flattened feet. The metal rings are not merely bizarre decoration; they repeat and accentuate the dissociation of parts, and the flattened forms of mouth, breasts, hips and fingers. The spaces between arms and body are eloquent; they alternate rhythmically with the masses, and contribute, even more than in the previous statue, a rangy, dynamic quality in keeping with the abrupt and irregular movement of the contours.

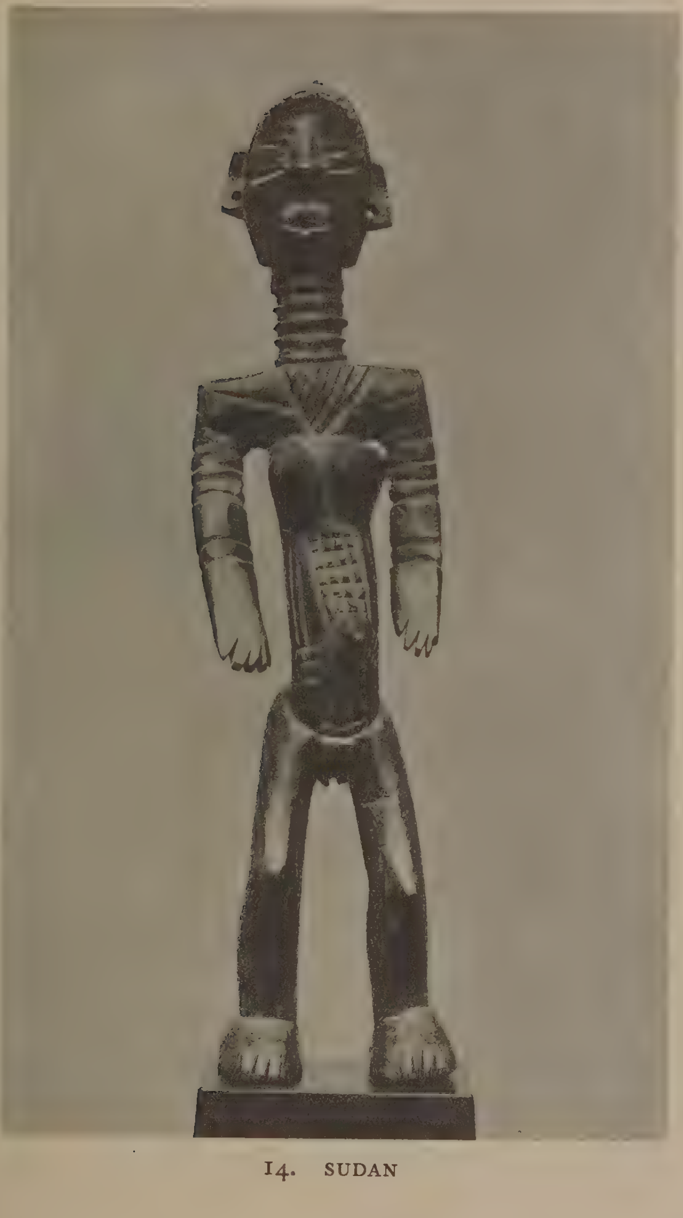


13. GABUN

3. *Sudan*

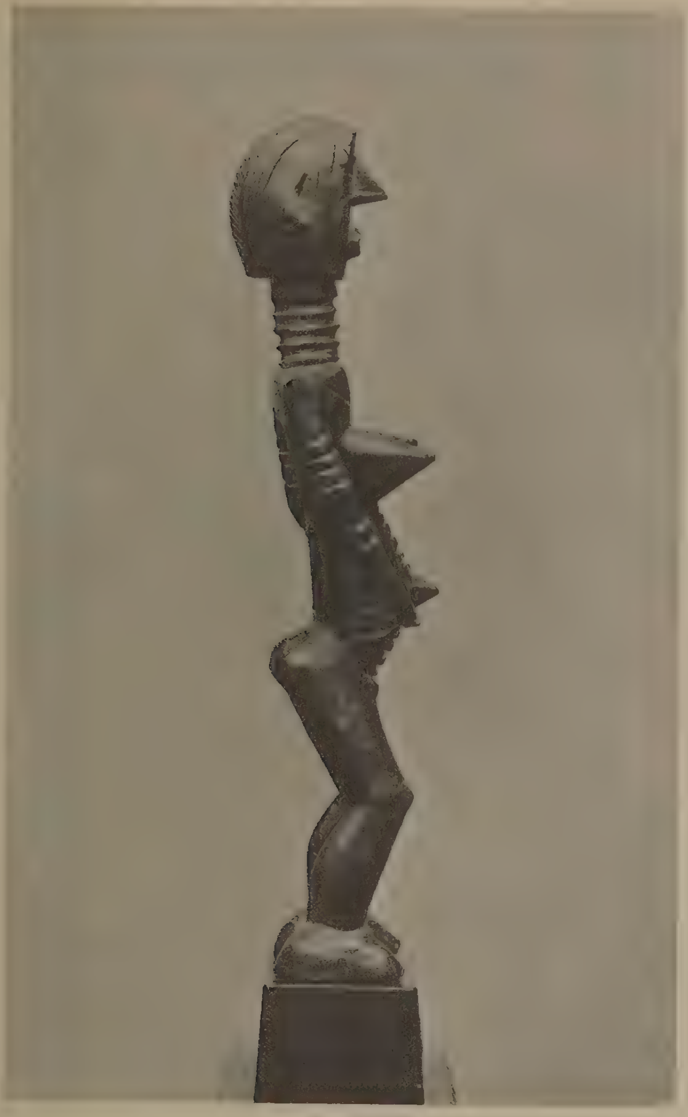
The typical Sudan piece is slender, elongated, angular, making frequent use of straight lines, pointed projections, flat planes and sharp edges. Its frequent awkwardness of attitude and crudity of surface tend to augment the total effect of sharp staccato force or wiry suppleness.

Fig. 14 is thin and stiffly angular, like a child's jumping-jack. At first sight crude and haphazard, it arouses in the observer unused to plastic form the feelings associated with a toy or caricature. But if these associations can be disregarded, the figure will stand out in its own right as a transformation of the body into a distinctive and forceful design. Its long, rigid parts are arranged in an unsteady equilibrium, animated and poised for movement. They meet and dart this way and that with a crisp, jerky, irregular rhythm. The figure resolves itself into a few equivalent masses; head and trunk, arms and legs. Long, sharp-pointed cones protrude horizontally forward and make a design. The two breasts are the largest of the series of conical masses, stiffly projecting. Above is a smaller cone, the nose, enlarged until one sees it in relation to the breasts. Below the breasts the navel sticks out in a point similar to the nose. Further down, the knees come to points like the breasts. Fingers and toes, mere rows of notches, make the limbs bristle out in four rhythmic clusters of points.



14. SUDAN

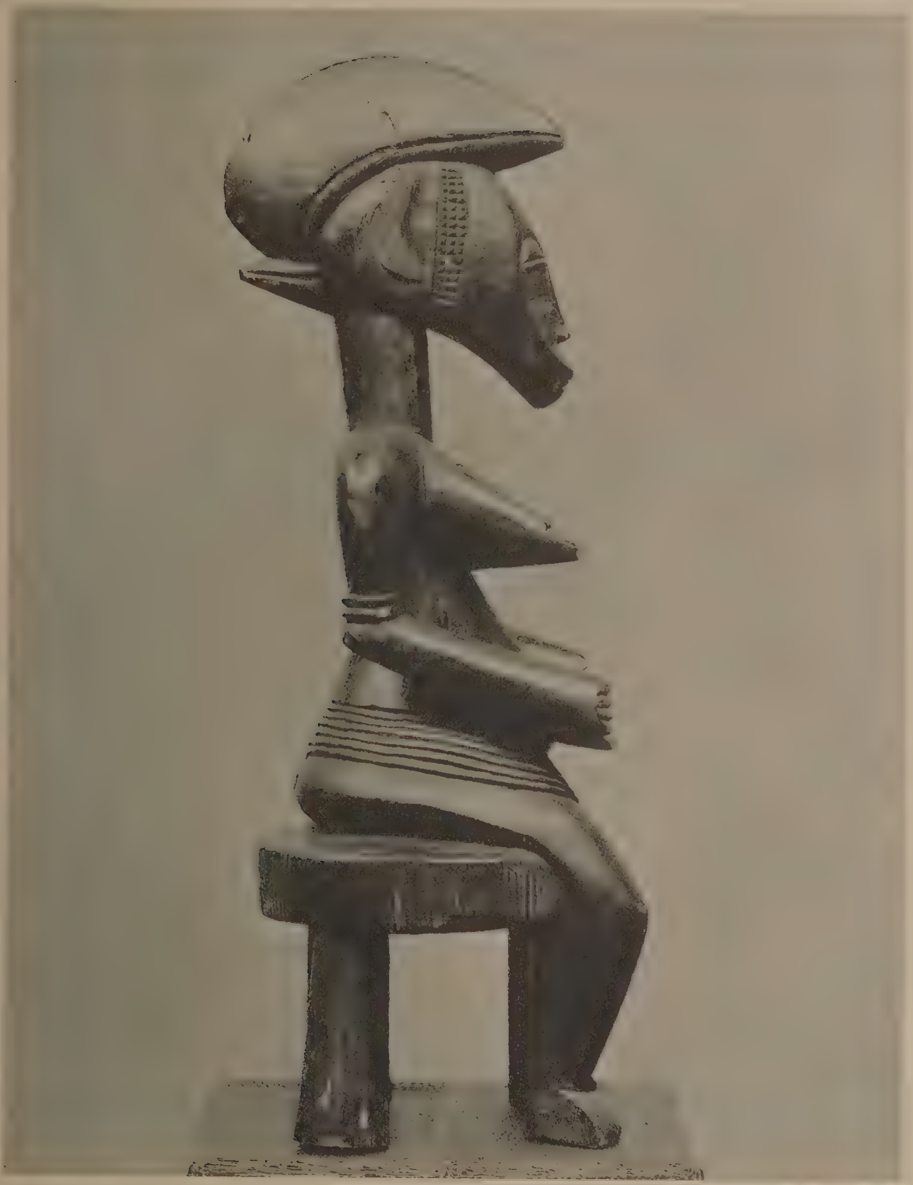
All the protruding points are integral parts of the structure; seen from the side (Fig. 15), the whole figure seems to gather itself up and spurt into them. The vertical line of the main structure is not continuous but broken into flat angles, with sides slightly curved so that they meet in the sharp points of the cones. The line has thus a saw-tooth quality. Alternate segments of it are approximately parallel; top of feet with thigh, arm, top of belly and breast, bridge of nose; the shin is parallel with the lower slope of belly and breasts; the top of head reversed in the line over the hips. These repetitions give again an effect of jerky rhythm, like a scherzo in music, irregular and syncopated, staccato in the straight lines, more fluid in the curves. The figure is firmly based on two flat cones of feet, with thick ankles above them, then rises swaying back and forth. Having the right ear higher than the left continues and balances the swaying line of the trunk. (This effect, and the whole quality of line, are often to be found in the paintings of El Greco.) The flat face with its sharp-edged projections carries out this rhythm consistently. The design is complicated by several surface decorations, which are in harmony with the structure; the curving contour of back of head is repeated in four incised lines on either side of head, and in the crescent-shaped ear; incised rings around the neck are repeated around each arm. Straight cuts on the belly emphasize the protruding navel, and repeat the straight-line angular rhythm. Surface decoration is thus fused with and reinforces the form of the masses.



15. SUDAN

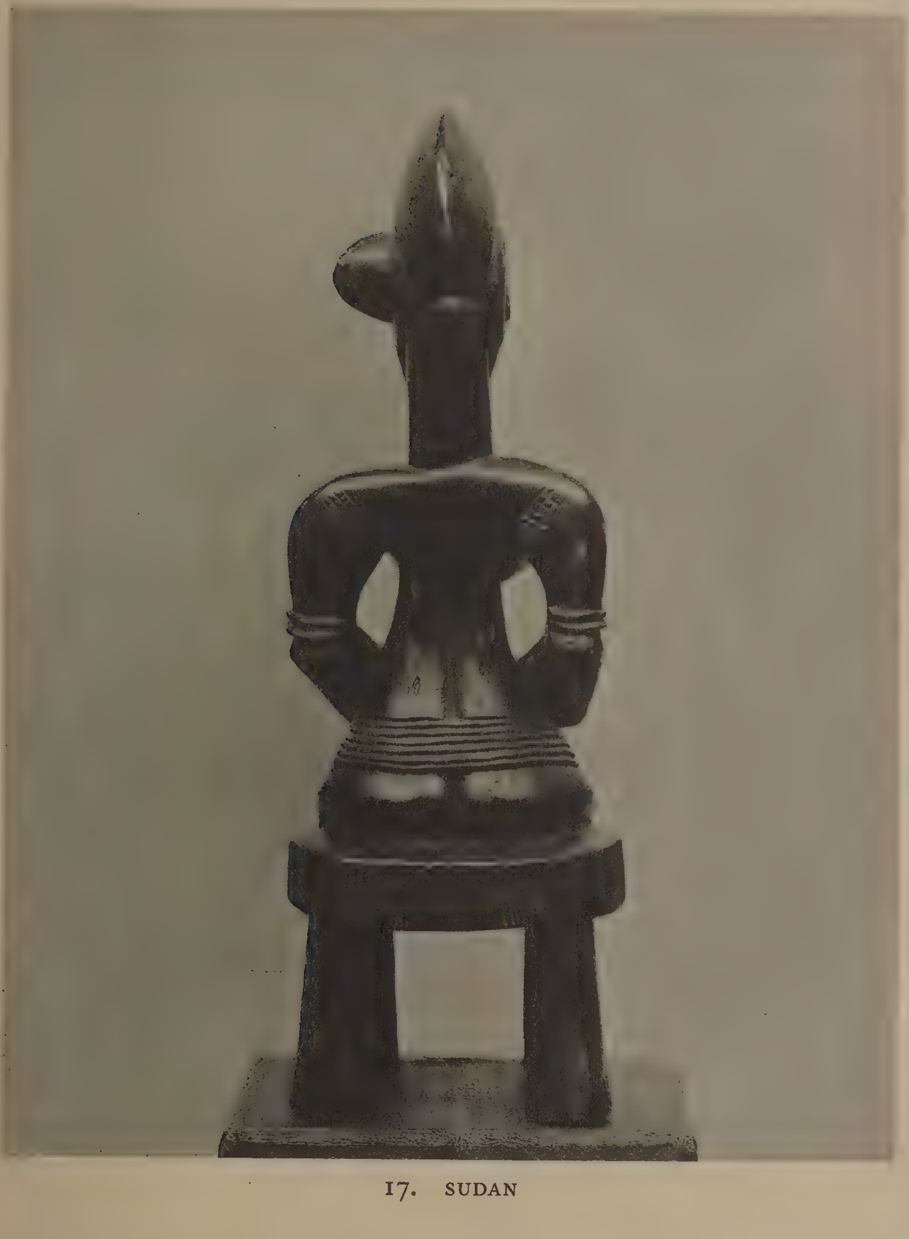
The seated figure (16) is more firmly based, more symmetrical and static than the other, softer in its edges and surfaces, but with a restrained energy in its interplay of angles and decisive curves, stiffly extended masses and projecting points. The conical motive is repeated throughout; every part is either a cone, some element in a cone, or a cone slightly distorted into some related form, such as a cylinder or a pyramid. Thus a feeling of unity and repeated rhythms is preserved; but contrast is introduced by changing the emphasis here and there to different conic sections and aspects, such as circles, ellipses and triangles. These are similar enough to form a continuous rhythm, but add interest through variety, as in the musical variation of a stated theme.

From the side the statue appears as a structure supported by rigid vertical rods, with an opposing series of slashing horizontal curves, jutting out into space, with rhythmic alternation of projection and hollow. The horizontal masses are varied by slight changes in direction and in degree of curvature. The structure, slanted back for equilibrium, is supported by the heavy conical hips (themselves a repetition of the breasts) and by the stiff upright cylinders of neck and stool-legs. The facial scars relate themselves to neck and chin in the design of intersecting diagonals.



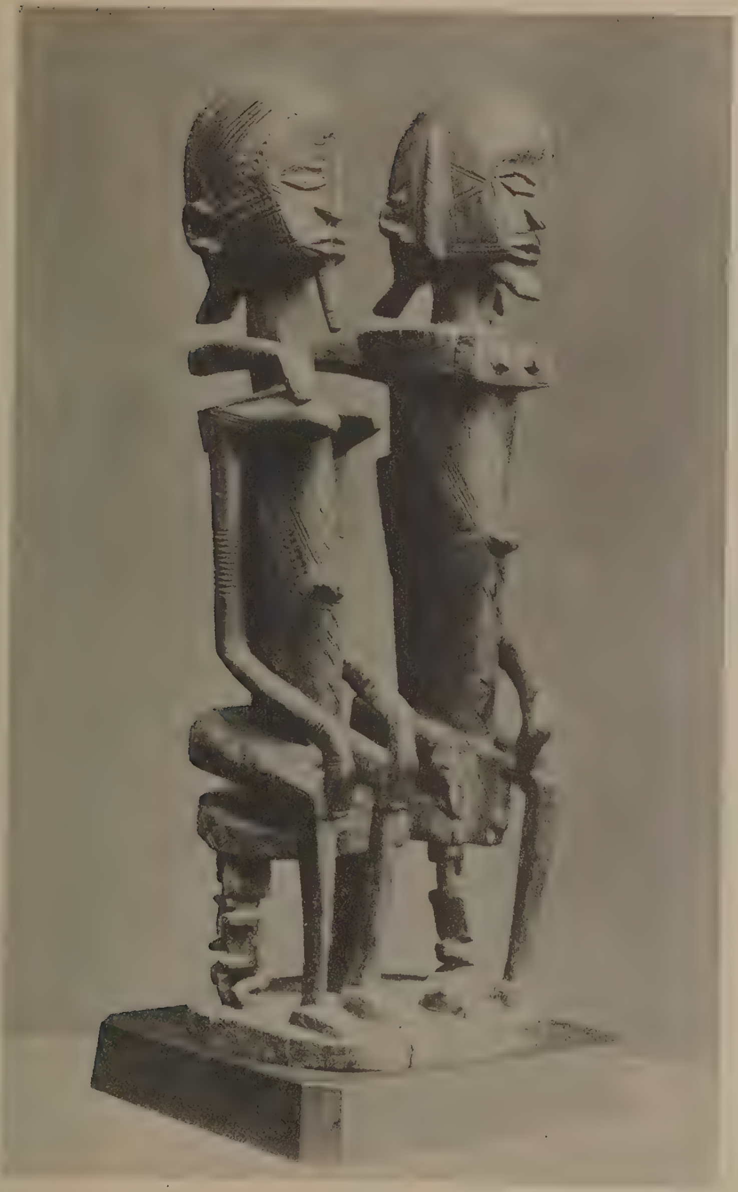
16. SUDAN

The back view (Fig. 17) is monumentally simple and symmetrical in its main outlines: a cone, firmly based, tapering gently up to a point, with a contrasting sweep of broad shoulders, dropping through the forearms into an angle whose direction is opposite to that of the cone. At the head the cone blossoms out into a cluster of rounded segments; its contour below is varied by gentle curves and sharp indentations, without the loss of internal rigidity. Decorative richness is added by the vertical, horizontal and diagonal grooves, which repeat the main lines of the structure.



17. SUDAN

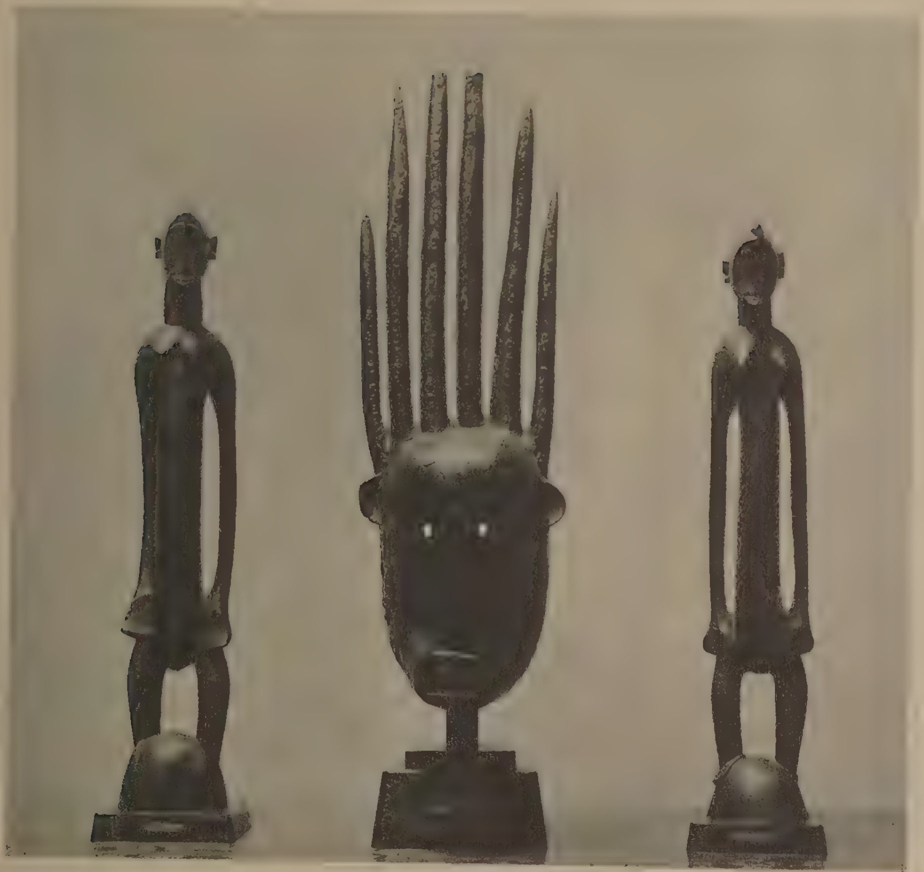
Less monumental, but more complex and delicate, is the network of slender rods into which the seated male and female figures (Fig. 18) are bound together. The trunks, stiff and solid, are entwined with smaller rods, some long and some shortened into mere protuberances, all jointed in an angular staccato rhythm, and flowing down with increasing unison to the springy and intricate framework of the base. The constantly varying direction of the rods gives the design three-dimensionality, in spite of the slenderness of its parts. The spaces between the rods, especially around the shoulders and hips, function as do those about the flying buttresses of a Gothic cathedral, to give a sense of airy dispersion and delicately articulated structure.



18. SUDAN

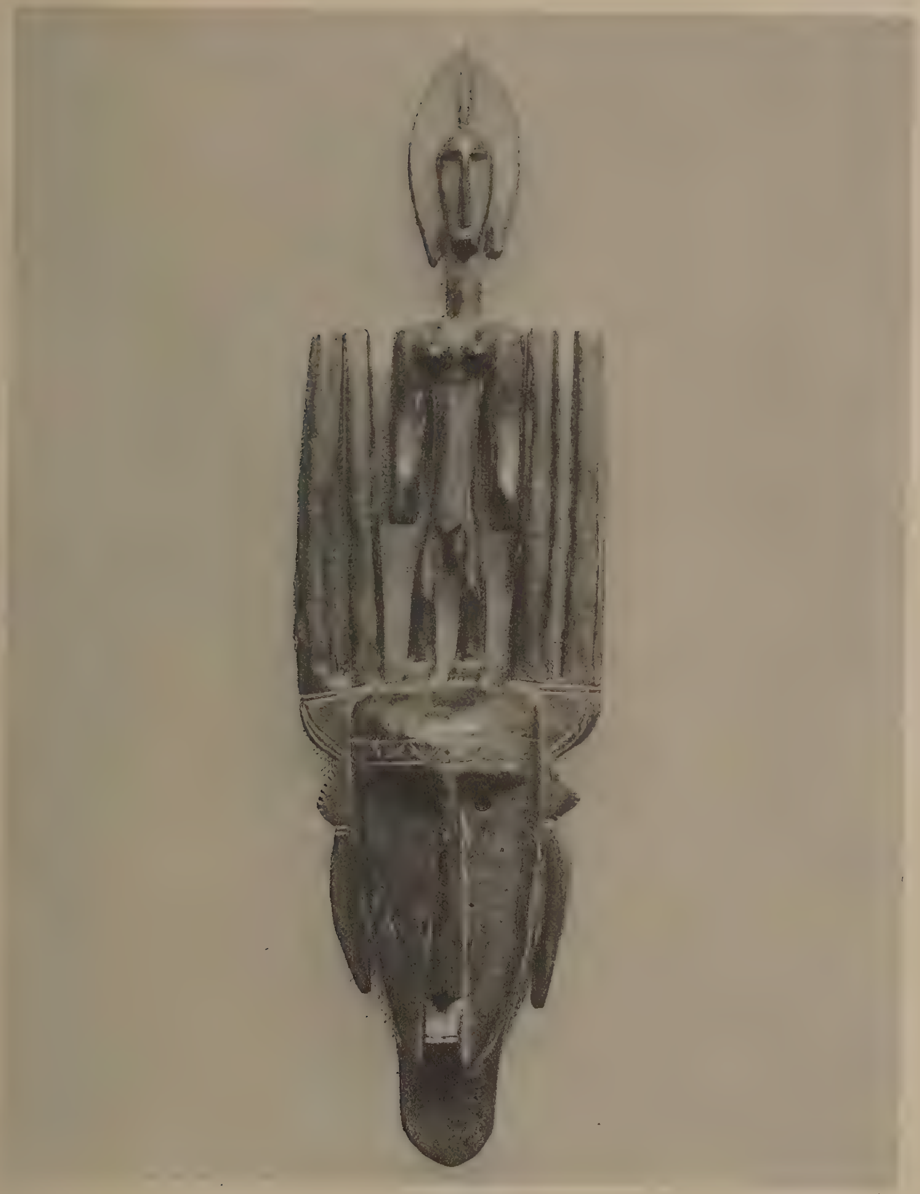
In a mask from the Sudan (Fig. 19) the traditional staccato rhythm is still more intense and rough, an explosion of harsh ejaculatory angles and sudden rough projections. A heavy, block-like head is violently contrasted with a plane consisting of six slender, rigid horns. The horns are made interesting by variety in length, shape and direction; their contour reverses the curve of the chin. The massive proportions of the former are accentuated by setting the horns and ears far back, so that the head projects from them, and also by gouging the cheeks in deeply, so that forehead, nose and mouth again project. This produces another series of violent contrasts. The forcefulness of the effect is heightened by simplifying the features, minimizing the eyes, omitting the chin, and enlarging the mouth until it is a large, hollow protuberance almost equal in size to the forehead. These two protuberances are seen together as a rhythmic repetition of masses. Their semi-roundness is in contrast to the roughly squared-off sides of the face. Eyes and ears are seen together as repetitions of a near-circular form. The forehead as a mass is also rounded, so that these curves contrast with the straight lines of the other parts. The nose is vertical like the horns, and of equal thickness, so that one sees it, and the row of notches on either side, as repetitions of the tall, slender forms above. But it is also short and fused with the forehead, a bridge between forehead and mouth, so that one sees it also as part of the heavy block-like design below.

In the two figures shown along with this mask, the slender, rod-like theme becomes again dominant. Here it is more supple and flowing than in the horns of the mask, and all the parts melt smoothly into one another. The flattened face with long, straight nose is typically Sudanese.



19. SUDAN

In a smaller mask (Fig. 20) the vertical rod and flat, sharp-edged plane are once more the dominant themes, stated most decisively in the row of upright horns and in the long, thin, rigid nose. In all parts of the small standing figure this theme is made to recur, so that a straight-up movement continues without material interruption, as a persistent rhythm from bottom to top. The conical breasts, reversing the small depressions of the eyes, are minor contrasting punctuations, and so are the horizontal mouth and forehead grooves, which parallel the line of the tops of the horns. Within these stiff right angles, to melt somewhat their geometrical hardness and provide a further contrasting undercurrent, straight lines are softened a little into curves in the standing figure's head, its body, the forehead below and the drooping rods outside the face, which parallel the nose to form a series like the horns. But as a whole the design towers up in menacing rigidity, an insistent rhythm of unyielding columns.

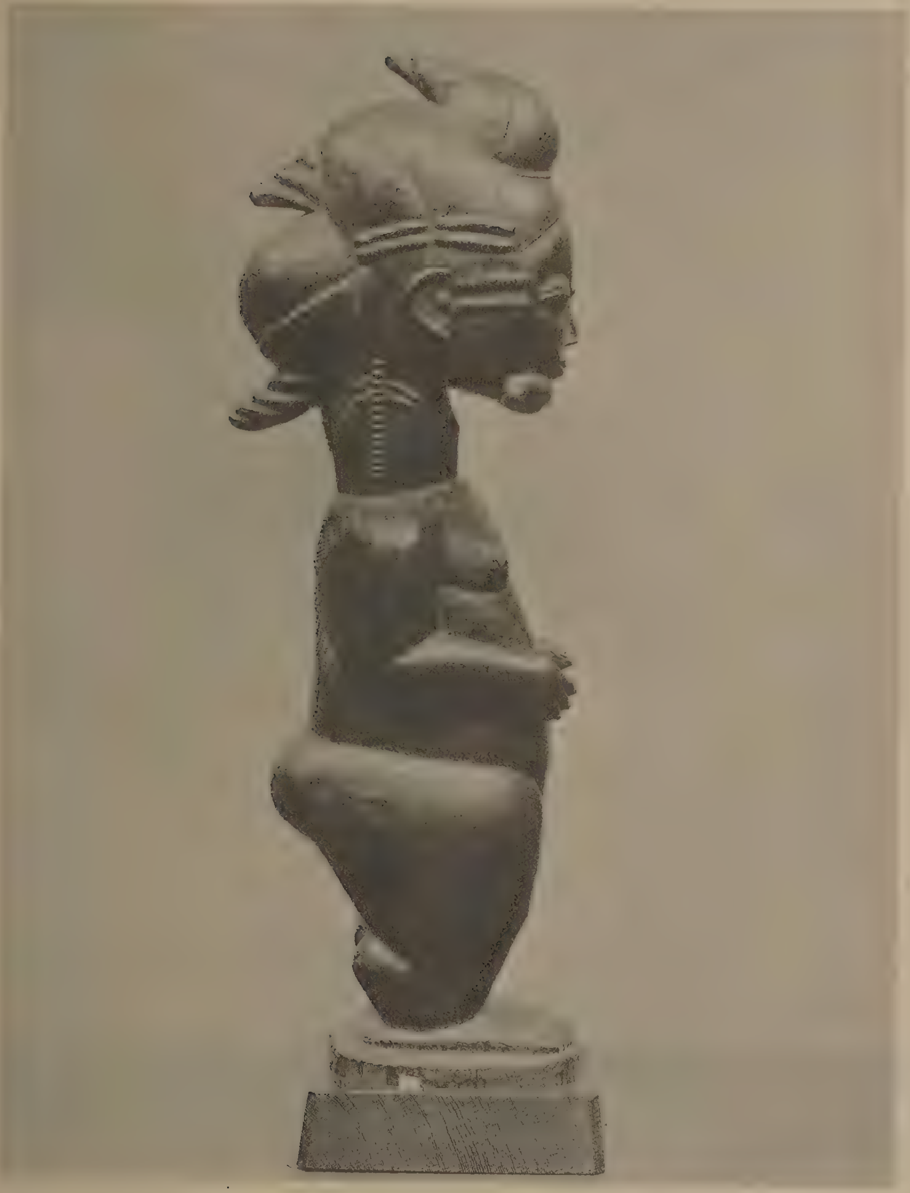


20. SUDAN

4. *Ivory Coast*

THE sculpture of the Ivory Coast is characterized by a tendency to surface ornament and richness of detail, rather than by rigorous paring down to structural essentials. Yet its ornamentation is not merely superficial, since the structural basis is itself strongly conceived in terms of design, and the ornamental elements intimately correlated with it. One may even say that there is economy, since all the details are made to count in the total effect; one does not feel them as distracting irrelevancies or as afterthoughts which could be eliminated without damage to the design. Constant use is made, not only of the main facial elements, but of others such as beards, tattoo marks, head-dresses, etc., which increase the possible intricacy and variety of patterns. All tend to be highly stylized, away from the naturalistic in form, and often into a rather hard, cameo-like finish. This is distinctly not, as primitive art is usually thought to be, crude and uncertain. It is evidently the product of centuries of practice in technical craftsmanship, of long refinement of methods. Yet, in the best pieces, it is not stereotyped into conventionality or formalized into dead geometry; no matter how symmetrical and suavely finished in detail, each piece contains the elements of variety, contrast, originality and unity which mean life to a design.

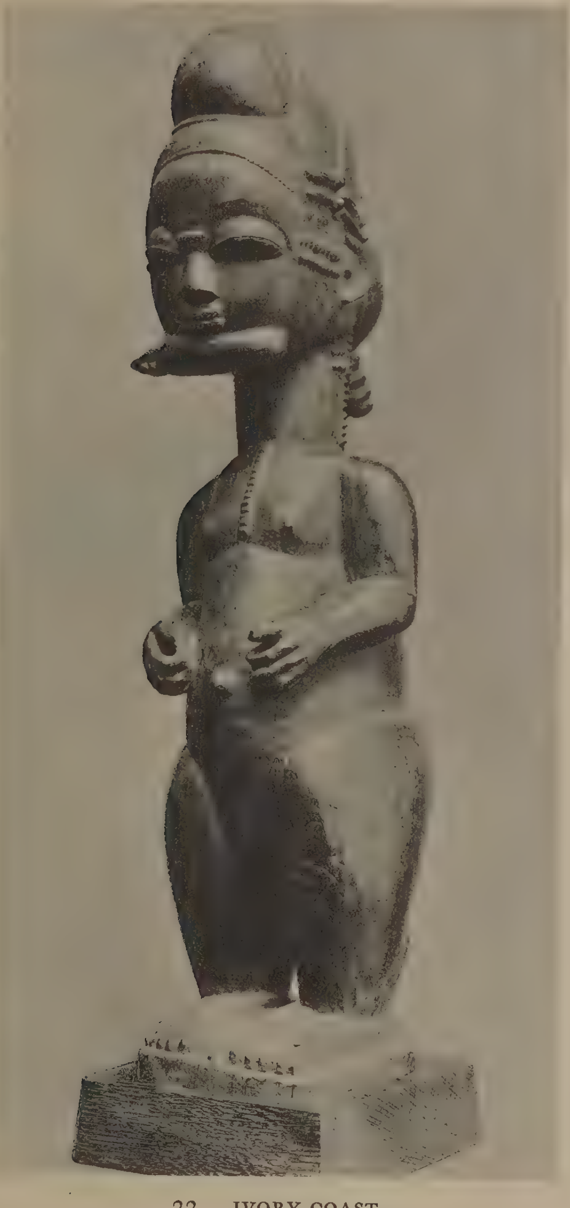
The statue shown in Fig. 21 combines with unusual success a powerful integration of masses with richness of surface ornament. From the side view, the figure appears as composed of three main masses, the head with neck, the trunk, and the legs. All of these are similar in size and shape, and thus establish a fundamental rhythm. The two lower sections join to form an ellipse, one end embedded in flat, broad feet, the other delicately balancing the large head. The front part of the head (disregarding the large mound behind it) is



21. IVORY COAST

in profile a triangle equivalent to that of the legs; the body above the hips is the same shape inverted; in the rounded conical hair-tufts this vigorous rhythm of masses is echoed in smaller and smaller sizes, with deft ornamental variation. In the detailed treatment of the three main sections, there is contrast, yet a feeling for appropriateness and the unity of the whole. In general, though the head is unnaturally large, the statue becomes more light and animated as it rises. The squat, heavy legs are devoid of ornament, which makes them felt as strong supporting masses rather than as surfaces. The trunk, which grows more slender as it rises, is elaborated with arms (tiny compared with the legs) and with raised scars; higher up, the scars increase. The head is dissociated into sections, and its surface decorated with an intricate pattern of linear tracery, both of which facts diminish its solidity, substituting lightness and movement, as in a Corinthian capital.

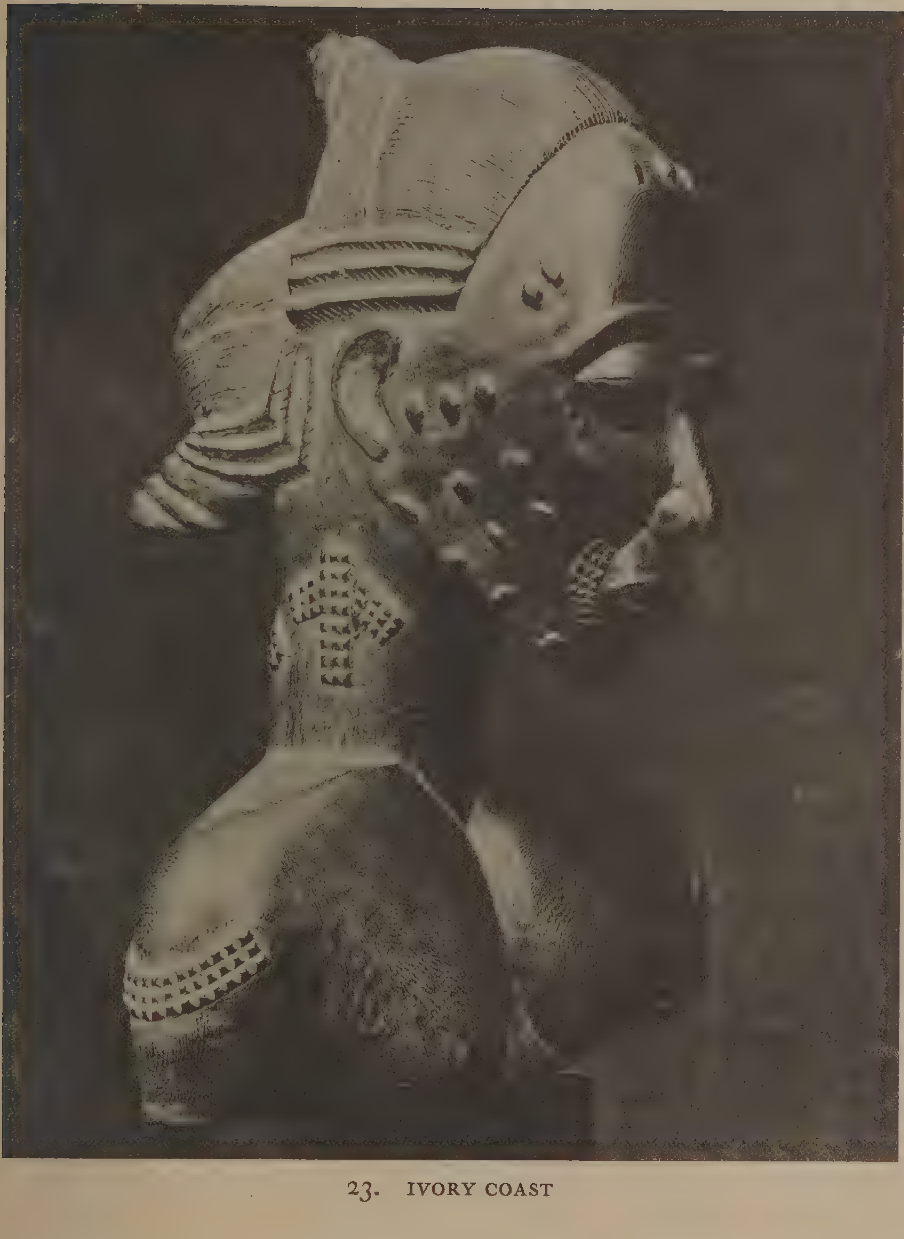
The three main masses are further united by repetitions of detail in configuration. All contain an opposition of horizontal lines (foot, hip, forearm, shoulder, chin, scars, top of head) to the main vertical of the figure, which latter is emphasized by the upper arm and a vertical scar on the neck. Similar rounded protuberances occur down the back (lumps on the head, shoulder and elbow, buttocks, calf and heel). Sharper ones come down the front (nose, lips, Adam's apple, knees). The shape of toes and fingers relates them to the facial scars. The surface of the head is a network of interlaced designs: from the beard up and over the head moves a rhythmic procession of mounds and twisted cones, and between the same two points, lower down, is a parallel procession of straight and curving ridges. Curved grooves connect the two series, and parallel the contours of the head. The ear is a central axis for all these circling and radiating rhythms.



22. IVORY COAST

As seen in Fig. 22 (a front view of the same piece), the statue falls into a new distribution of masses. The head and neck (when seen from directly in front) form an ellipse of three sections: lump of hair, broad face, and neck. These correspond to neck, trunk and body, as seen from the side. The beard (a horizontal rod like the arms) juts out at one side only, which breaks up stiff symmetry, and contributes to the swaying movement of the whole figure, away from the vertical, then back again. In this movement the softly swelling planes of face and body, grooved horizontally, join with a gentle andante undulation.

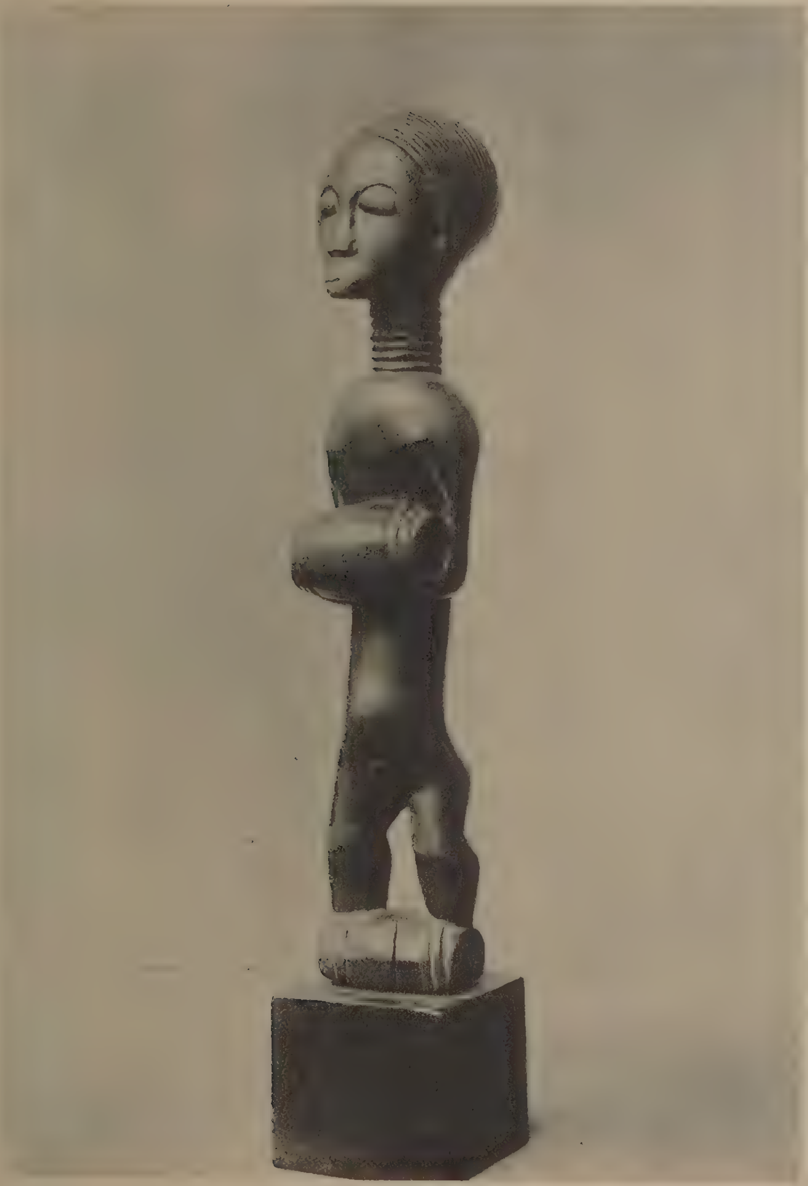
The continuity of the Ivory Coast tradition is apparent in the more recent bust shown in Fig. 23, in spite of its drift toward naturalism and facial expressiveness. As in the statue just discussed, there is consummate elegance of surface texture, based upon and integrated with a forceful contrast in direction of three principal masses, here consisting of a tall thin head, thin shoulders, and a tall straight neck to join them. Symmetry and static equilibrium are subtly disturbed by the tilting upward of one shoulder, and downward of the chin, but the rigid neck holds the parts firmly together. They are further united by rhythmic series of raised planes, grooves and ridges over the surface. As the head falls into two main sections, hair and face, the chest is likewise grooved into halves. A procession of angles and points marches over the head from the branching top of this groove through chin and nose to the pointed tufts of hair. The rounded breasts are echoed by the eyes, by the nostrils, and by the two halves into which the mouth is pinched; the ears by scars beside the mouth. Each ridge and groove has a function, or more than one: to contrast in texture various areas of the surface, to dissociate parts into a rhythmic sequence, or to reinforce the sense of rigidity or cohesiveness of parts where it is needed (e. g., on neck, above and behind ear).



23. IVORY COAST

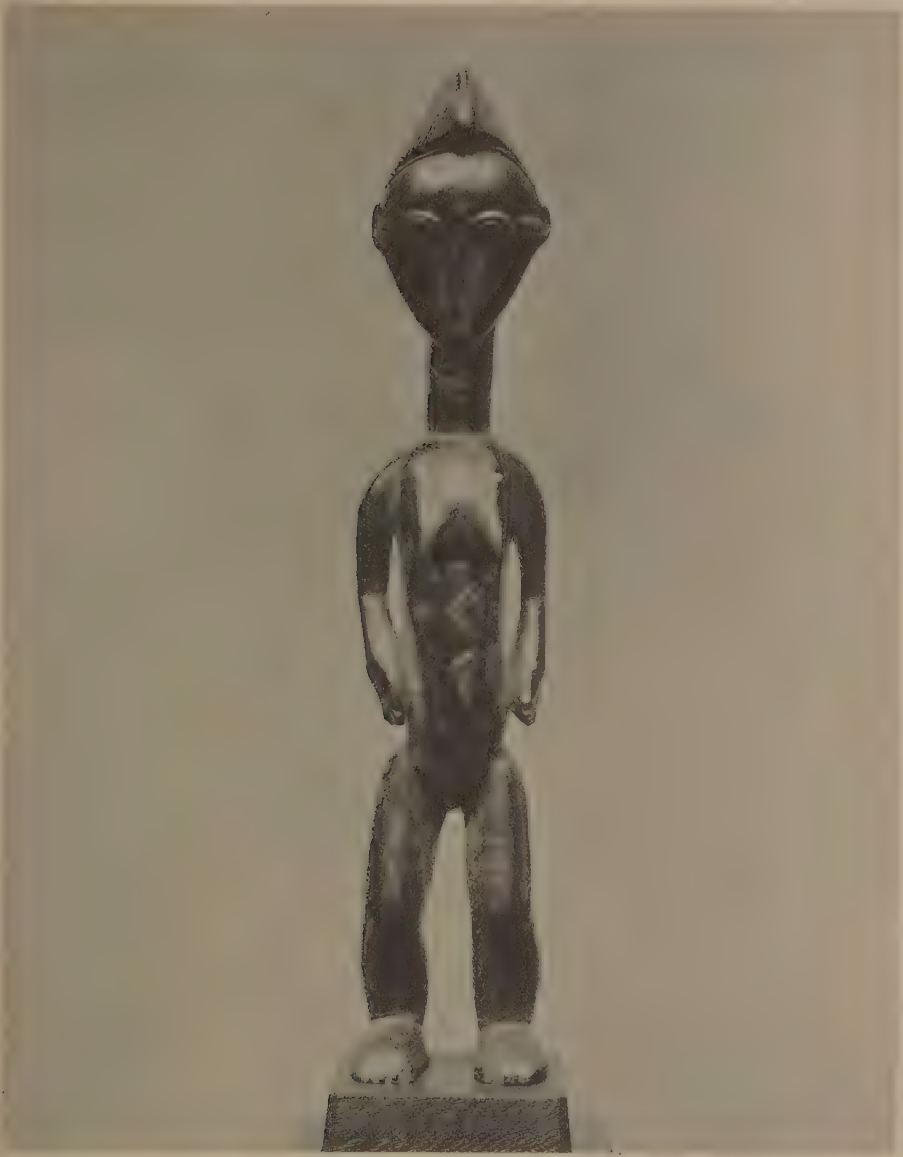
The shoulder scars give definiteness to the base, by reversing the head's contour, and relate it to the surfaces above, without destroying its essential plainness. Nobility of feature and an expression of tragic meditation bring this head nearer than most negro sculpture to the Greek ideal of moral and physical perfection. Yet in gaining this appeal, it tends to lose another and more distinctively negro quality: the strength and uniqueness of plastic design that are attained only through far-reaching transformation of the human body.

Accessory objects may be so thoroughly integrated with a human figure as to form a single plastic whole. In Fig. 24, two kegs are inseparable parts of the total design, not only because arms and legs melt uninterruptedly into them, but because their shape is echoed with variation by all the body's parts. In the head and in the chest, which constitute a striking rhythm by themselves, the keg-shape is rounded almost to a sphere; in neck, trunk and legs, it is attenuated to a series of delicately moulded cylinders. Keg-hoops, neck-rings and hair corrugate the surface here and there, in contrast with the soft smoothness elsewhere. Between the firm, decided accents of head, shoulders and kegs, the contour flows with light and quivering gracefulness.



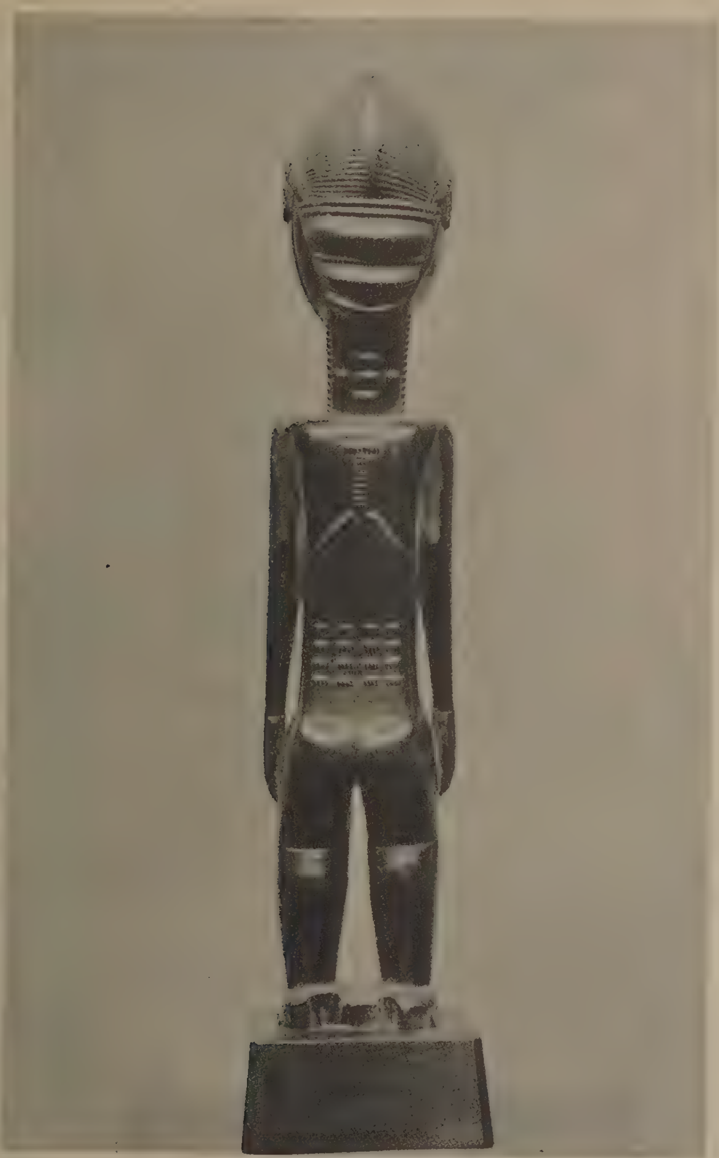
24. IVORY COAST

That a line of easy informality is compatible with deft workmanship is illustrated in Fig. 25. In contrast with a finely finished head of diamond shape, made of straight lines and tight curves, the body flows here and there with a rangy, irregular suppleness that is enhanced by the zigzag scars, and by the slight surface roughness. This type of movement hints strongly at intermixture with the Sudan tradition, as does the shape of the hands, simplified into a sort of notched fringe (cf. Figs. 14 and 15).



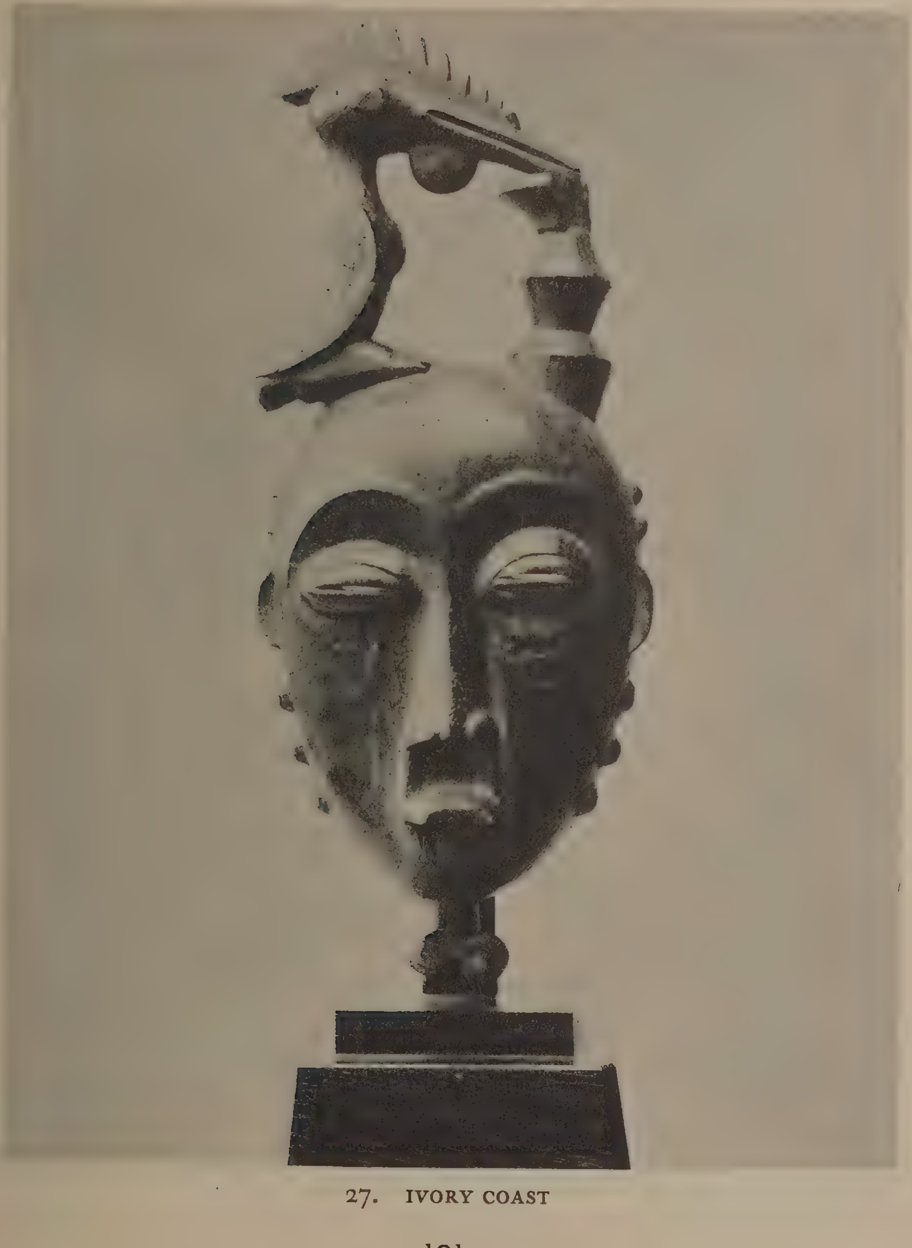
25. IVORY COAST

The smooth, symmetrical, and slightly hard perfection of Fig. 26 is more purely Ivory Coast in feeling. Once again there is a clear dissociation into contrasting masses, an oval at top and bottom, with two precise oblongs between. Again the parts thus severed are plastically joined by continuous rhythms: the expansion of the head's curves into the graceful lines of back and legs; the relation of grooves and ridges on each of the masses to the main contours of the others; the relation of the spaces within the arms to that within the legs, and of the latter to the head's vertical ridge. The result is a matchless combination of opposites: of fundamental simplicity with elaborate finish; of rigid, immovable strength with grace of line and sensuous, decorative suavity of surface.



26. IVORY COAST

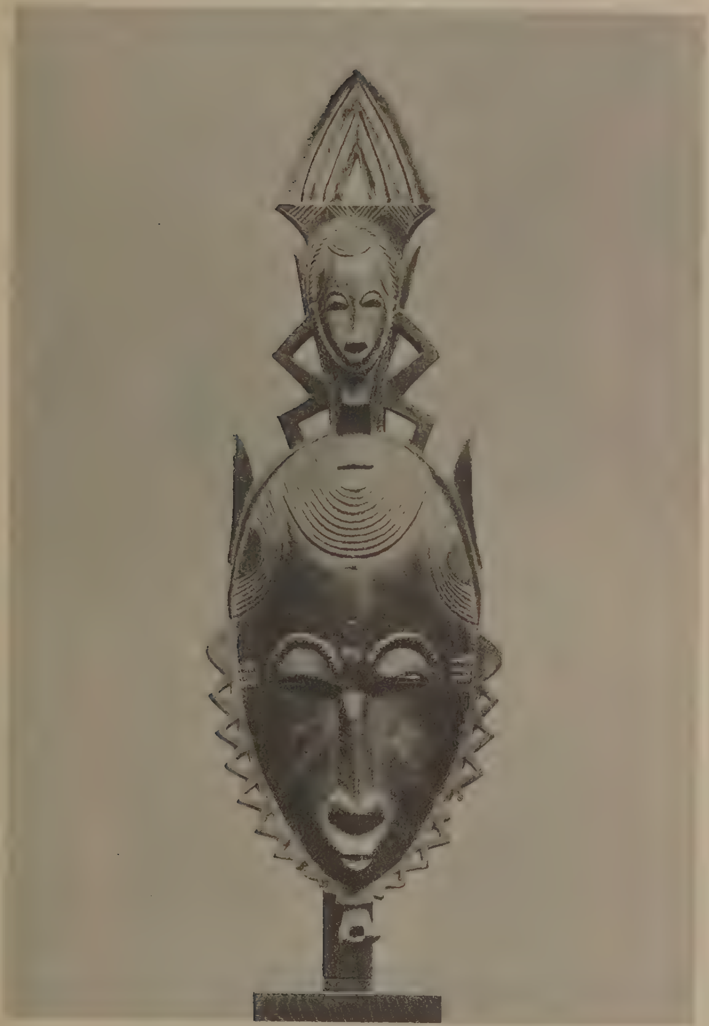
The artist of the Ivory Coast did not attain perfection through avoiding difficult and unusual problems. In Fig. 27 he has undertaken a bizarre combination of strongly contrasting elements. Below, there is a smoothly symmetrical face; above, an irregular, jagged crest; the latter itself is composed of two dissimilar elements, a bird with curving back and an upright pedestal. Yet each part is again related to every other by the rhythmic repetition of forms. The bird itself is an ingenious combination of two crescents of equal size (head and body). The angles of the pedestal parallel, more stiffly, the main contours of the bird. Thus the parts of the crest, though their prevailing effect is of contrast, are subtly tied together. The bird's bill, moreover, parallels the top of the forehead beneath, and the curve of its body is that of the cheek diagonally below. The mask's mouth and eyes, and the wattle under the bird's bill, are four similar ellipses symmetrically placed, which serve as a framework binding the whole structure together. A similar binding effect is exercised by the encircling series of studs about the face, in relation to the saw-toothed comb of the bird. The small, stylized beard, with its two round segments, echoes the eyes, mouth and nostrils; in addition, since one of these segments extends farther out and down than the other, it serves to correct the disequilibrium above between the large bird and the small pedestal. Beneath the apparent utter contrast of crest and features, there is another basic rhythm: the nose and mouth, connected by a ridge, stand out as an oblong mass from the flattened cheeks on either side, and the flattened chin below; in the crest just the opposite relationship exists: an oblong hollow is enclosed by three masses (bird's body, pedestal, and bill above). This rhythmic alternation and reversal of masses with hollows and spaces, noted already in several figures, is characteristic of negro sculpture generally, and to some extent of all powerful sculptural design.



27. IVORY COAST

Another Ivory Coast mask (Fig. 28) is frankly symmetrical and formal; it is finished in workmanship to a delicate refinement of surface, with a classical severity of linear pattern. Here again the artist has faced the problem of uniting the face with an ornamental crest above it. A fundamental bond is provided by the fact that the main element in the crest is a small reproduction of the face below; each line and projection below is repeated above. While such repetition is rhythmic, it tends to monotony, so variation must be introduced. At the same time the two faces must be plastically unified, so that they will not seem like two separate designs.

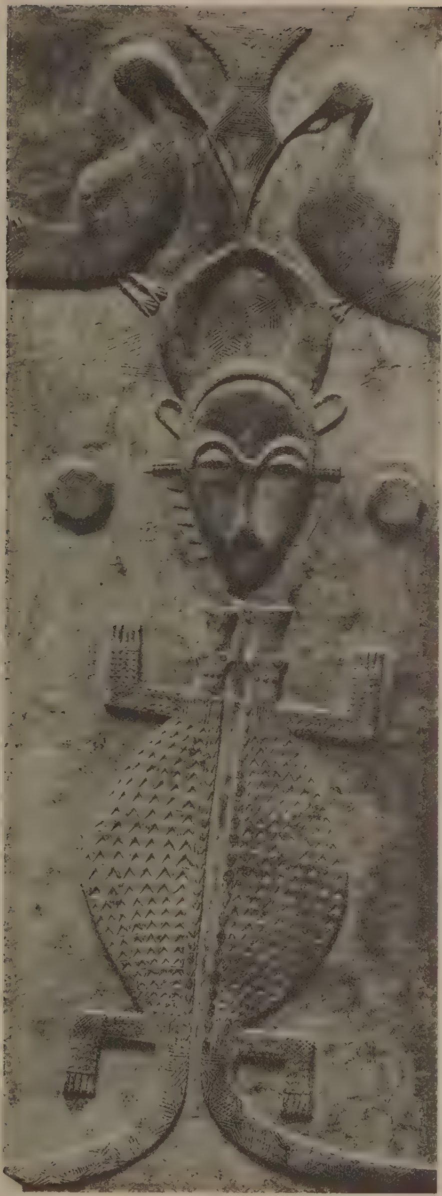
In solution of this problem, the size and shape of the crest are calculated, with relation to the face, so that the two together make a single ellipse, the eye leaping naturally over the gap between the horn-like ornaments on the temples and the triangle at the top. This triangle is a reversal of the bottom of the face, so that already a basic relationship between crest and face is established. For variety, the small face is painted brown instead of black, like the lower one; its features, being smaller, are a little simplified, and outlined in black for emphasis and clarity. The other parts of the crest serve to bind it to the face below, with varied repetition of its rhythms. The cluster of triangles at the extreme top is almost a reversal of the hair ridges on the forehead, the latter being turned to curves for variety. But the former is painted white, like the sides of the horn-like ornaments on the temples; also for variety. Repetitions below of the angles and points above are made to connect the small face with the large one, and to act as ears and beard around the latter. The mouth is a similar angle, small and chinless so as to bring the face to a graceful point. All through the movement angles are softened into curves, then stiffened again into angles and triangles. On the forehead are three symmetrical groups of parallel curving ridges, which as corrugated surfaces contrast with the smoothly curving planes below. As curves,



28. IVORY COAST

they repeat in various positions the arches of the eyebrows and of the nostrils. Elsewhere are straight angular cuts and ridges, for contrast. The straight horizontal of the lower eyelid is carried out sideward in rows of small square scars, which resemble in shape the square segments into which the eyebrow arch is divided. Two different rhythms are thus in motion at once: a series of smooth but firm and decisive curves (ellipses and parts of ellipses) and a series of crisp staccato angles. They interlace, echo and reverse each other, here one predominant, there another. The mouth suggests both the angles of the beard below and the small arches of the nostrils above: these angles themselves are individually sharp, but arranged in a curving row. All the multiplicity of movements is tamed and regulated, each fitted precisely into place and confined to its proper scope, so that the whole is a structure of almost frozen perfection.

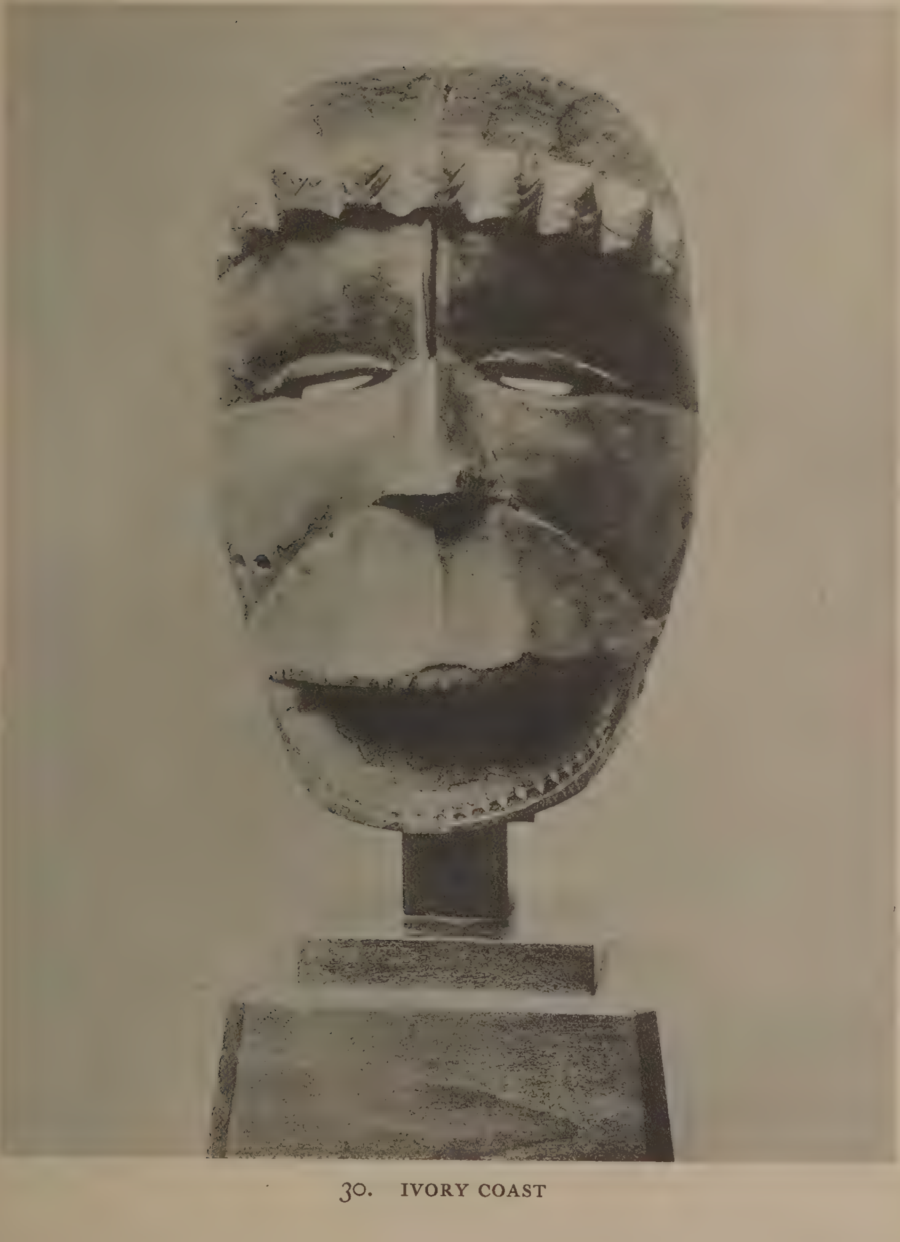
The Ivory Coast artist's traditional skill in surface pattern has free play in this bizarrely decorated temple door (Fig. 29). Sacrificing three-dimensionality even more completely than in the mask, he finds in the low relief a correspondingly greater opportunity for elaborating his design over a single broad area. The elements are loosely, somewhat unsymmetrically distributed, with an air of casual freedom. They strike the eye first as a succession of different designs, each complete in itself and internally rhythmic. There is a repeated shock of contrast between lines curved and angular, surfaces plain and surfaces cut into a variety of all-over patterns. But the units cannot be regarded long in isolation, for pervasive themes appear and subtly bind them together: the large ellipses in crocodiles, mask and birds; the repeated parts of these ellipses (in birds and crocodiles' tails); the minor motive of small triangles. Distortion for design appears in the joining of two crocodiles to form a single



29. IVORY COAST

ellipse. The surface is enriched with mottlings of red, white and black, but its essentially sculptural character is maintained by the emphasis on variation of planes, with a consequent everchanging play of lights and shadows.

The masks of the Dan constitute a somewhat distinct form, in spite of certain resemblances to the prevailing Ivory Coast tradition, such as fineness of surface texture. The majority stay fairly close to human physiognomy (see Fig. 8), but others, like the present one (Fig. 30), achieve striking distortions. A frequent but not universal characteristic is a narrow vertical ridge from the nose up to the forehead, which functions in dividing the forehead into rhythmic segments, in prolonging the nose as a vertical axis, and sometimes as an element in linear pattern. Here the effect chiefly emphasized is a sharp contrast between the soft curving cheeks and the harsh, angular projections below and above. At first sight the whole face seems violently distorted and broken out of shape, the forehead jammed down from above, the mouth burst out into enormous, cliff-like ridges. Then rhythmic relationships begin to integrate the parts. The huge, cavernous mouth, dominating the whole face, is echoed in the groove between lip and cheeks, in the horizontal groove into which the eyes are compressed, in the shapes of the eyes themselves, and in the fillet of hair across the forehead, which is chopped like the lips and teeth into a line of notches and ridges. The facial expression is of a battle-shout, and this is plastically conveyed throughout the mask by an explosion of rigid planes.

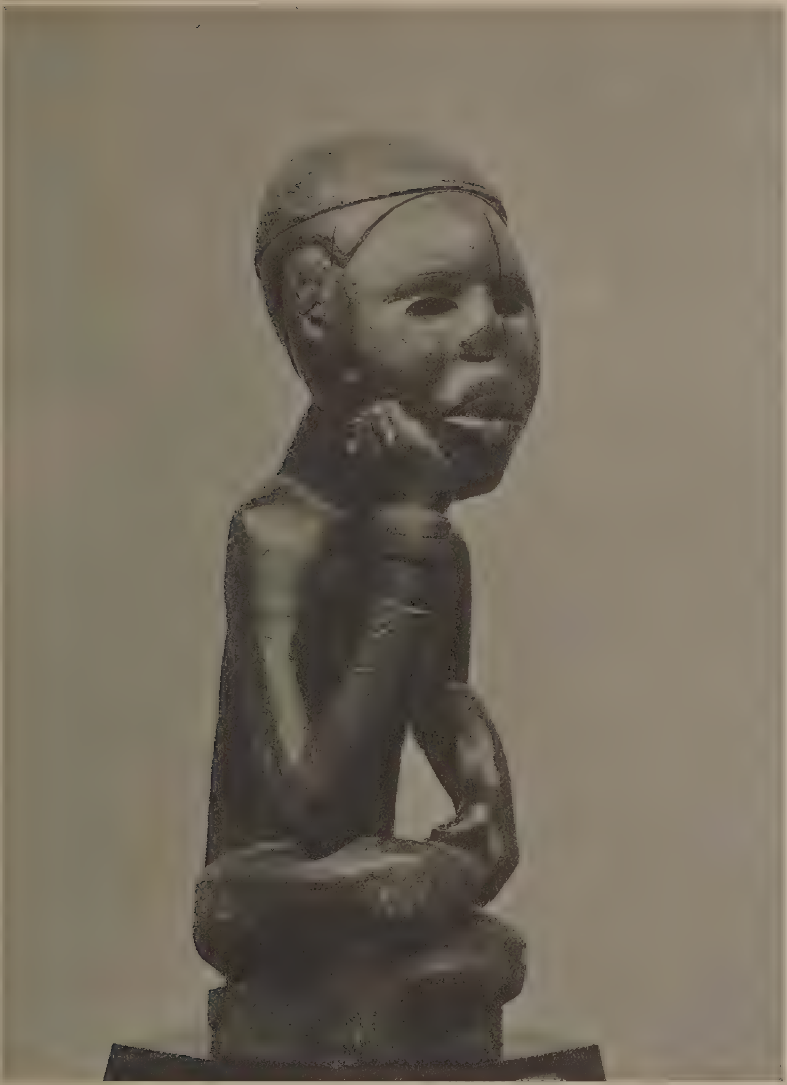


30. IVORY COAST

5. *Congo*

THE French and Belgian territories about the Congo River are enormous in extent, and include so great a variety of peoples that no generalization can be made about their art as a whole. The vast majority of objects produced there are unimpressive plastically, tending either to extreme crudity of workmanship, to unimaginative naturalism, or to overloading with superficial decoration. These faults are often concealed by a profusion of nails and bits of cloth, which make the figure an odd but rather shapeless conglomeration, especially among the Bushongo and related tribes. However, pieces of considerable force and fine draftsmanship are occasionally found, in which faces have often a portrait-like naturalism, along with distortion in other parts, and a thoroughly worked out total design. But there is sufficient variety in the designs to point to the existence of many different traditions, rather than of a single prevailing one.

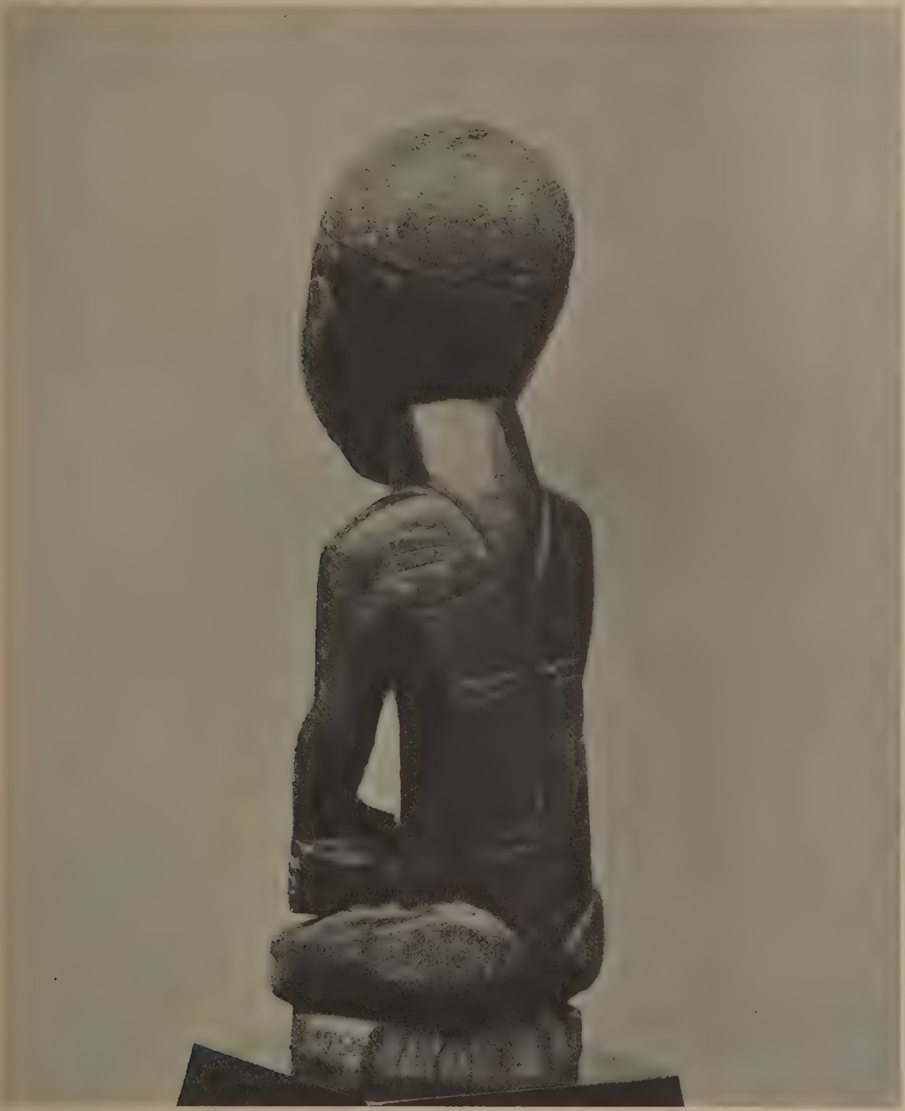
Fig. 31 is a typical product of the Bushongos, and is not unlike some of their royal portraits, though more free and imaginative in design. Although lifelike, it is far from natural proportions, and achieves an effective contrast in shape and direction of masses. This depends upon the combination of two different forms, to which all parts of the body are reduced; the large, egg-shaped mass of the head and the slender, serpentine limbs. There is an obvious contrast between the full, heavy roundness of the former and the latter's flowing, sinuous flexibility. The connections between them, which make the figure a plastic unity, are also easily discernible. In the first place the trunk is intermediate between the two forms, more elongated and cylindrical than the head, yet more thick and rigid than the limbs, and thus able to support the upper mass. The thigh is still more attenuated, but rigid; the upper arm and forearm, suc-



31. CONGO

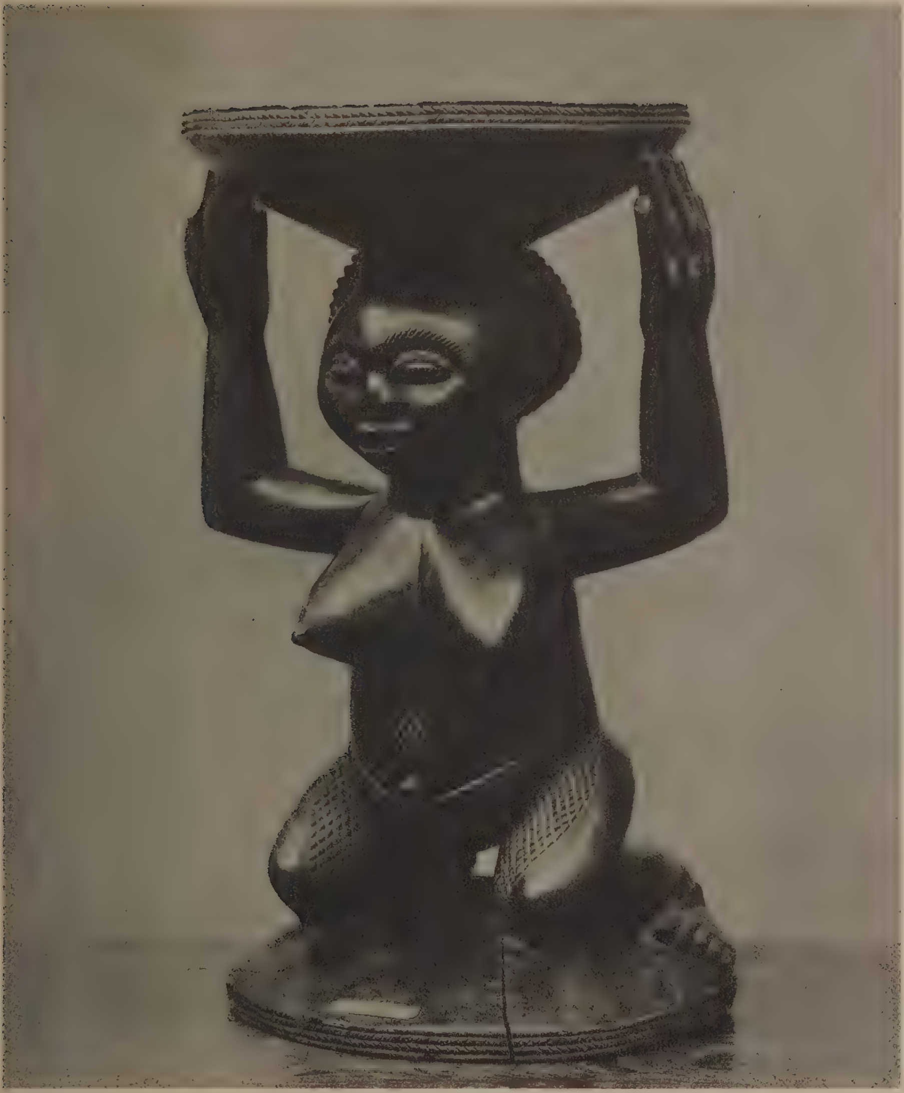
cessively, are more thin and supple. Coiled legs and seat, together, make a mass equivalent to the head. The elbow's angle repeats the contour of the head, a series which is further carried out, smaller and smaller, in the angle made by the back and thigh, in the small angle of the foot below the thigh, in the ear, mouth and surface incisions of the head.

The back (Fig. 32) is grooved into sections which repeat these curves, with a greater tendency to straightness (note also the rectangular scars) to make up in rigid strength what it lacks in supporting limbs. Going around the figure, we see the serpentine masses coiling continuously around it, the trunk up to the head being swayed to one side to continue and balance this movement. Returning to the front, we see the oval, convex plane of the head reversed in the eye-depressions, rising again in the full lips, sinking in the space between the arms. The movement of the piece is thus continuously undulating, swelling and diminishing, with a minor motive of angularity for strength and contrast. It is expressive of the mobile, fluid equilibria which a living organism assumes, rather than of the rigid balance of inert masses.



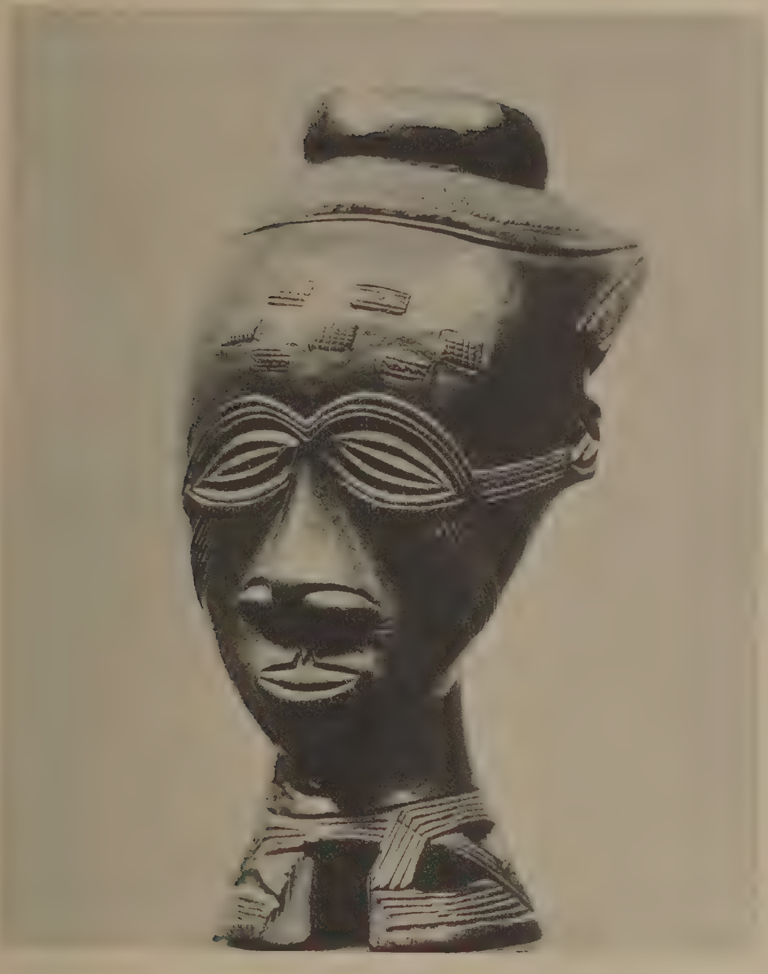
32. CONGO

In the statue supporting a table (Fig. 33) the dominant theme is once more an egg-shaped mass. It is stated most forcefully by the full and prominent breasts, and each other major part of the design is a varied repetition of these oval masses. The table-top and base tend to squeeze the figure together, until it bursts into a heavy, laboring zigzag contour. Their comparative flatness, the thin, stiff arms and fingers and the sharp chin serve as minor contrasting notes, to accentuate the short, bulging fatness of the other parts, although as mounds and cones they are in harmony with the prevailing ovoid theme. The rounded points at chin, ears, elbows, nipples, navel and knees are felt as rhythmic repetitions, and as protuberances into which flow the soft swelling planes and the full, distended masses within them. The features repeat their lines and planes. A feeling for surfaces appears in the strong contrast between the rough, hair-covered planes and the smooth, rippling patine elsewhere. Through the complex unity of its architecture, dispersed yet controlled in three-dimensional space, through the voluptuous animation of its surfaces and their sure adaptation to the masses beneath, through the intensified spirit of physical vitality which persists in spite of (or rather because of) its amazing distortions, this figure achieves a rare degree of mastery over sculptural means.



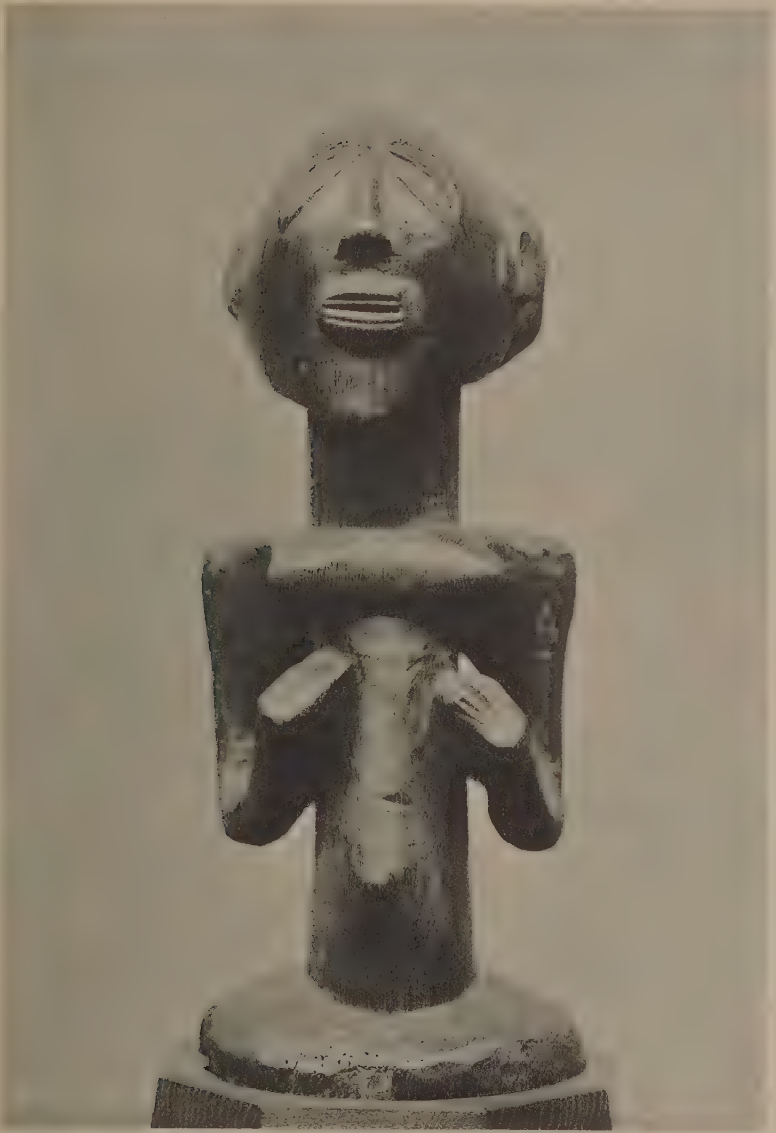
33. CONGO

A head-shaped Bushongo vase (Fig. 34) shows a tendency akin to the Ivory Coast in rhythmic elaboration of linear surface tracery, but with different distortion of features. The relations between chin, neck, nose and points of hair at back form a structure of masses that is simple but adequate to sustain the weight of ornament; the general effect, however, is toward decoration instead of structural firmness. The pattern of mouth and drooping eyes, arranged as three similar ellipses about the nose, is often to be found in carvings of the Sangha region.



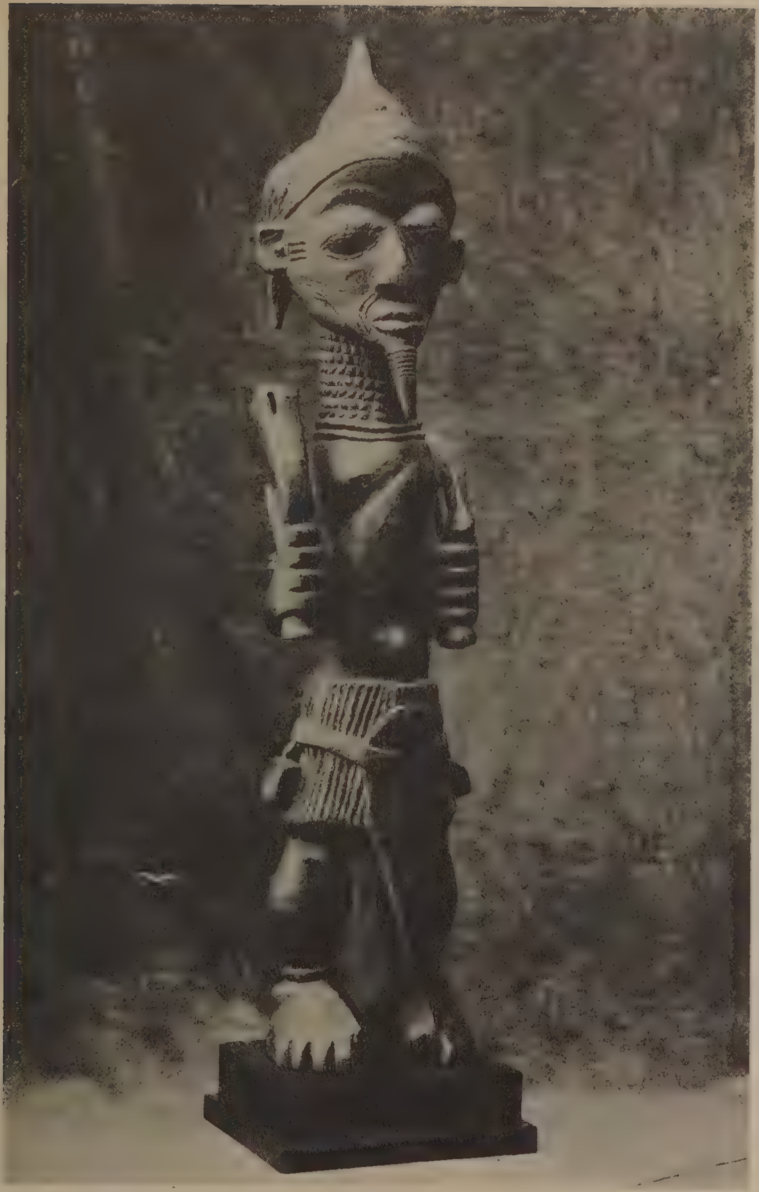
34. CONGO

In Fig. 35, a Sangha fetish, this pattern appears more simply and emphatically. Here its relation to the design of masses is more structural: base, trunk and forearms are to each other as mouth, nose and eyes. The total effect is of rough, bizarre force instead of surface finish.



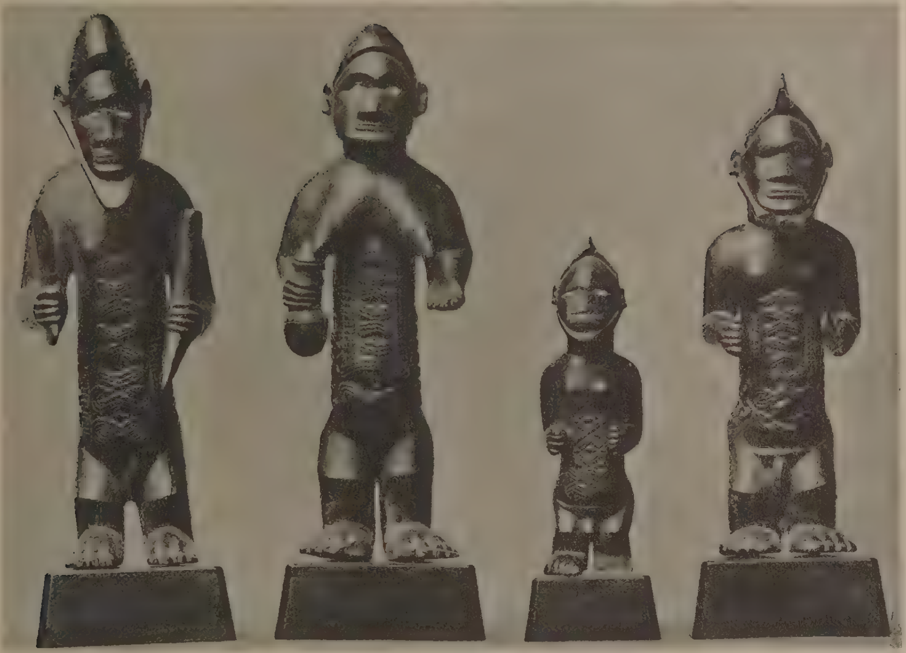
35. CONGO

There is a suggestion of Ivory Coast in the elaborate decoration of Fig. 36, as well as in its pointed hair tufts; but it lacks the smooth delicacy of that school. Sudan may also be called to mind by the prominence of jagged points and angles; but here that motive is on the surface only; the underlying masses are full and static—a cylinder with a globular mass (head and legs) at either end. The roughness of execution does not imply lack of skill or certainty; it aids the jagged surface rhythm to express a feeling of stark militancy, in harmony with the subject. The rigid fullness of the basic masses provides an inner structure fairly adequate to sustain the profuse varied animation outside. Nevertheless this profusion is carried almost to the point of overloading, and the figure as a whole lacks the monumental simplicity of the Gabun. There are no unrelated parts: each point, groove and rounded swelling forms an element in some subordinate pattern, and the several rhythms thus established are interrelated with transitional steps of extraordinary intricacy.



36. CONGO

The carvings of the Sibiti (Fig. 37) are usually small in size, and in feeling not monumental, but rather familiar and intimate, like the painting of genre subjects. While far from naturalistic, they have a naïve, pert humanity of gesture and attitude, and frequently introduce accessory objects from daily life. The desire to render tribal tattooings emphatically is perhaps responsible for the characteristic elongation of the trunk, but the distortion thus secured is plastically effective. It is sometimes used for an interesting mass design, as in the second figure from the left. Points, angles and curves are occasionally repeated with a feeling for rhythm, and surface decorations are rendered with precision of miniature detail. As a rule there is little strength in the composition of masses.



37. CONGO

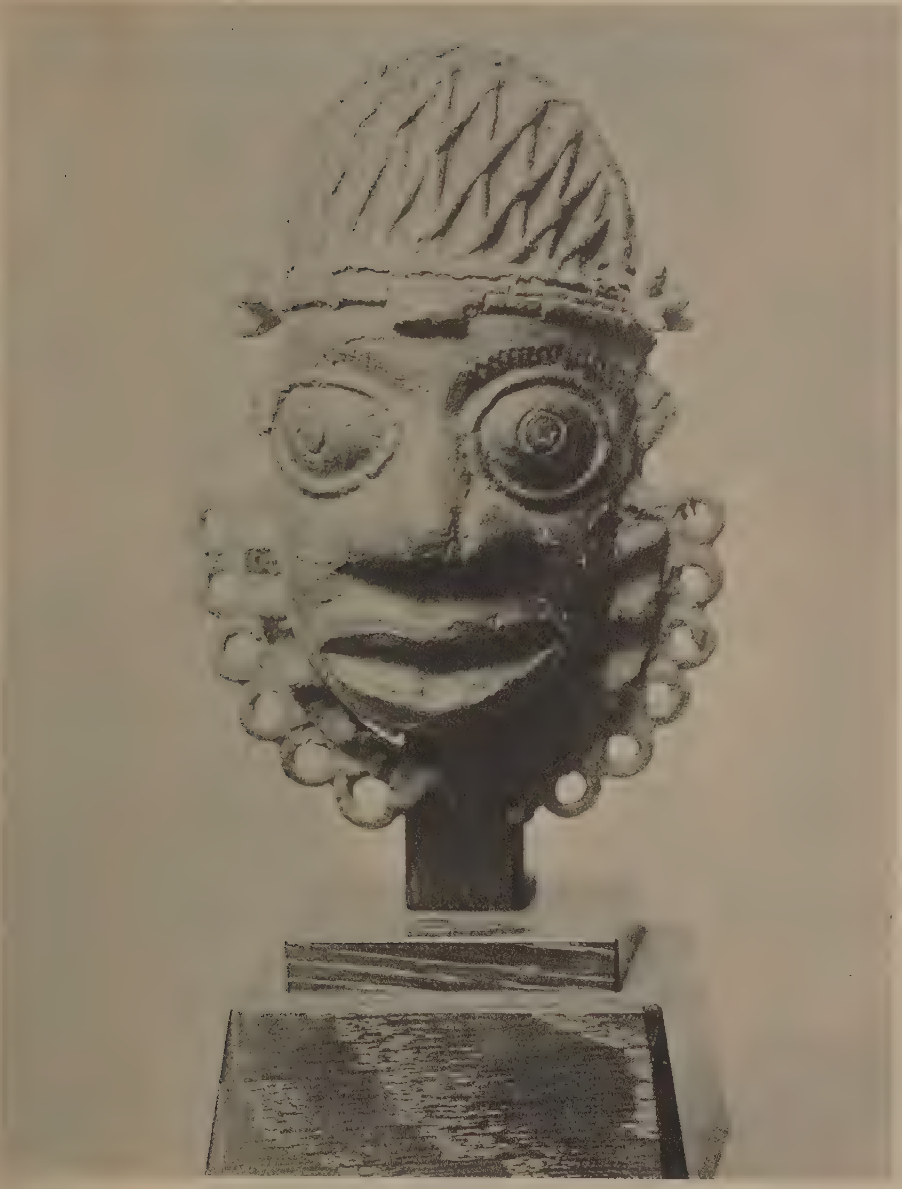
6. *Minor Traditions*

An exhaustive account of negro arts and crafts would take note of the work of several other large districts, as well as of variant forms in the districts already discussed. But examples have been shown of the traditions most important artistically, and the rest may for present purposes be ignored. Occasional works of good quality have come from these other districts: from French Guinea, from Dahomey, and less often from Camerun and Sierra Leone; rarely from territories beyond the limits of West Central Africa. Such works are so unusual that they may be considered sporadic flights of individual genius; they seem often to belong to far distant schools, and may be transportations or imitations. They introduce few notably distinctive forms. Aside from such occasional achievements, the products of districts other than those above discussed are either unimaginative literalism, or feeble gropings toward a form that is never realized. The stick of wood, though gouged, scratched and painted, remains a stick, and not a new organism.

A. BENIN

Excavation among the ruins of this ancient city, once the seat of a Portuguese colony, disclosed some years ago an art which was among the first from equatorial Africa to become celebrated in Europe. Its naturalistic bronze heads with ornate coiffures and high ringed collars, its war and hunting scenes in ivory and wood, were easily appreciated, since they involved to no great extent the peculiar and extensive distortions of negro sculpture. Later acquaintance with more purely negro works has revealed by contrast the tendency of the Benin school to structural weakness and loose, extravagant decoration.

Occasionally distortion produces a distinctive pattern, as in this small bronze face (Fig. 38). The features are enlarged and thick-

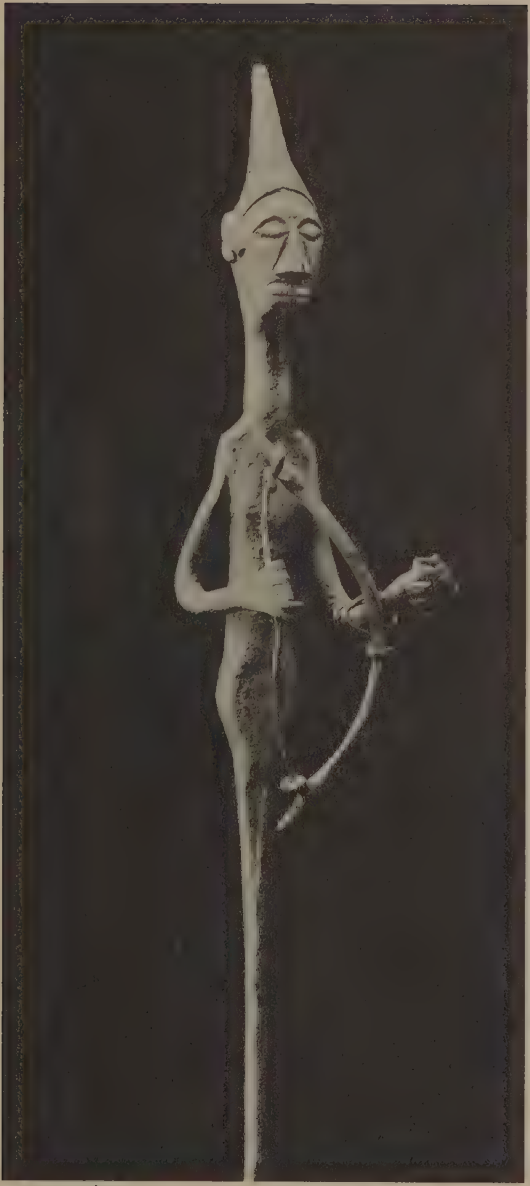


38. BENIN

ened until they are larger than the surrounding planes; thus the former function together as a broadly swelling rhythm. The circular eyes are echoed in the cap and beard; in contrast the fillet, base of nose and upper lip are straight, but the lower lip provides a transition to the other motive.

B. DAHOMEY

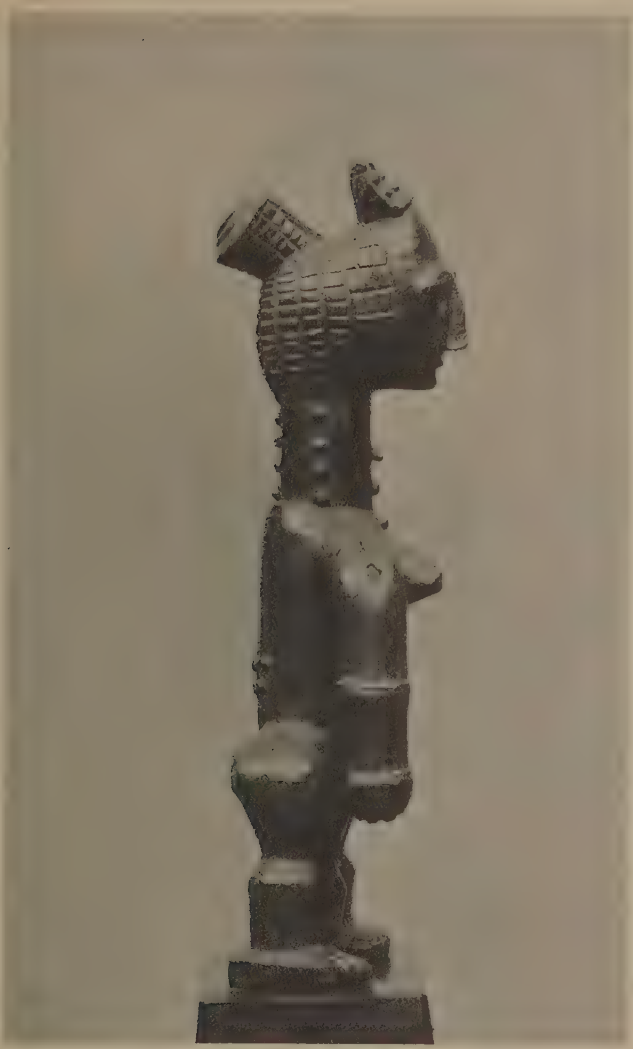
There is far more mastery of solid structure in Fig. 39, together with a quality invaluable in all art: feeling for the nature of the medium used. Harder than rock in the head with its pyramidal nose, tough and elastic in the arms and bow, a rigid, piercing dagger in the cap and base, the design is a perfect realization of the qualities of wrought iron. From the firm rhythm of head and body, it flows outward to a sinuous linear tracery, unsymmetrical yet full of answering curves, rich in airy spacious intervals. The whole figure, in spite of its smallness, soars upward as delicately and unerringly as a Gothic spire.



39. DAHOMEY

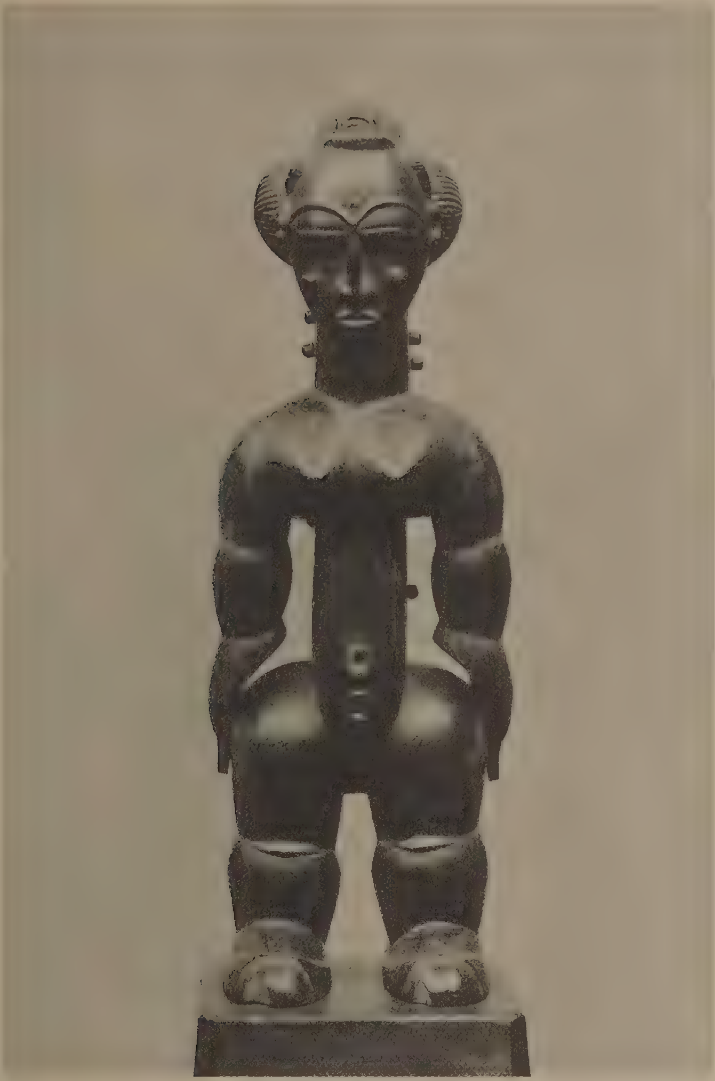
A comparison and contrast of these two figures, similar in pattern yet far apart in spirit, will summarize a few of the qualities most often noted in the foregoing analyses. Both embody the essential principle of negro sculpture, observable in all the chief traditions: the parts of the body are *dissociated* into segments, marked off from one another by definite boundaries; each part is altered until it is recognizably similar to others, so that a sense of *rhythmic repetition* is produced; yet sufficient *variety* is retained to avoid monotony, and to preserve some resemblance to the natural object represented. Here the parts happen to be rounded or cylindrical, small and strung together like beads. They appear from the front as combined into three distinct groups: a straight rod of trunk, neck and head, and two U-shaped curves, the arms and the legs. The hair repeats these curves. The opposition of the curves to the vertical upright is a difference in direction so marked as to be termed a *contrast* of themes, rather than a variation of a single theme.

This contrast is less marked, however, than in many other works previously observed. Fig. 41, in fact, carries the principle of repetition almost to the point where it becomes monotonous and uninteresting by comparison with the best negro work, though still immeasurably more animated than most European designs. Its three groups of parts are almost identical in size, the main difference being that two of them are bent into curves. The bead-like units are so similar to each other, in spite of ingenious minor variation, that the rhythm is somewhat tiresomely obvious, lacking the other's quality of unexpected and striking change of shape and direction. The very crudity of Fig. 40 helps it to avoid this fault; it is naïve, essentially primitive, representing the principle of rhythm at a stage where it is still somewhat intuitive and groping rather than self-conscious. Its poise is ungainly, but full of life; its rhythms are direct, impulsive, ir-



40. GUINEA

regular and strong, and the resulting ensemble is bizarre and fantastic in the extreme. In the more sophisticated figure the method is calculated, sure, carried out with an obviousness that suggests the too rational formula, dangerous in all art. Yet it gains in exchange a degree of delicate refinement and precision of finish that would be hard to surpass in civilized Europe. In spite of their close kinship, then, these carvings are in some respects at the opposite poles of negro sculpture, and indeed of all art.



41. GUINEA

CHAPTER IV

ITS RELATION TO CONTEMPORARY ART

By 1907 the European art-world was ready to discover African sculpture. During a generation, at least, several influences had been at work to break the spell which a few fixed forms—the Greek and Florentine in sculpture, the Florentine and Dutch in painting—still held upon the European artist.

In the first place, there had been a revival of interest in several exotic arts: the Japanese print, the Chinese landscape, and more primitive objects from the excavations in Egypt, Crete and Central America. Gauguin's paintings of the South Seas were beginning to popularize in a new form the perennial longing of civilization for the primitive. Not only were his subjects taken from savage life, but his plastic means were in harmony: a heavy, stolid line, and flat areas of bright color that well expressed the heavy languor of a tropical existence. These facts did not lead directly to the interest of artists in negro art, but paved the way for its popular reception. Through the acquirement of new tastes, it was being realized more clearly than ever before that strange, apparently structureless things might, when looked at afresh, come to seem strikingly beautiful, and to disclose a new kind of structure. In particular, it was being realized that primitive arts often possess a vigorous inventiveness, a direct sensuous power that sophisticated art may do well to emulate.

Still another tendency was leading even more directly toward interest in the negro form. In pioneer circles, at least, the victory of Cézanne had been won: a painting could be regarded, not as an imitation of nature, to be judged by its fidelity to the model, but as a creation in itself, a design in which the natural object was a theme to be utilized, rather than imitated. Radical artists were striving less to interest by subject-matter, by the intrinsic nobility, sentiment, morality or picturesqueness of the theme; more by new plastic forms, that is, by the original and satisfying arrangements of their lines, lights and shadows, colors and masses.

Chardin and many another accepted old master had done just this. But the artist's right to alter natural forms with a view to emphasizing such arrangements was far from being granted. It was not even realized that every painter and sculptor, ancient or modern, who had achieved a style of his own, had in so doing inevitably distorted nature, seen it through his own eyes, transformed his model. It was not realized that an exact copy of the model, were it possible, would be no more creative art than a plaster cast, or a photograph snapped at random. The distortions practised by Greek and Renaissance artists had become so familiar that they seemed to be only faithful copies of the object, in fact more natural than nature itself. These particular ways of outlining, shading, composing and coloring on canvas, of shaping muscles, hair and features in marble, were the only ways that nature could be seen and represented. Every artist who broke through the conventions of his time had to justify himself, or be justified by friendly critics, on grounds other than his right to a personal vision. In times of antique-worship David and Ingres were defended as more faithfully following the Greeks; in times of nature-worship the Romantics, the Barbizons, Courbet, were all defended as more faithfully representing nature. Even the Impressionists were defended as accurately portraying the effects of sunlight in the open (which of course they did), rather than as working out new effects of light and color that were pleasing in themselves. The truth was that each of these pioneers had revealed a new aspect of nature by seeing it in a new and individual way, by selecting the aspect which impressed him most, emphasizing it, omitting other aspects; in other words, by distorting or transforming nature. Doing apparent violence to a model may be the profoundest realism, in that it reveals an aspect of reality that has never been noticed before. Conventional modes of representation may seem to be realistic because of their familiarity. Yet they are only one sort of distortion; they reveal, in an artificial combination, one small group of nature's countless aspects.

Both ideals, following the antique and following nature, have stimulated artists to creation unawares; in trying to imitate Praxiteles, or to reproduce a landscape literally, the man of strong imagination has been driven unconsciously to produce a new and personal form. But the conscious attempt to be imitative has tended to restrain and intimidate him; he chastens his imagination, tries to force himself to see with the eyes of others; he goes only a little way from the accepted standards of what is classical or natural.

For this reason the movement inaugurated by Cézanne was revolutionary in its effects, though not a complete break with the past. His pictures, we now see, were no less realistic, sometimes even no less classical in spirit, than those of his contemporaries. But he diverged unusually far from the accepted ways of representing nature, and from the aspects of Greek art usually followed. He transformed the model not only differently but much more boldly, did not hesitate to stretch an arm as the early Greek vase-painter had done, as El Greco had done, in order to emphasize a curve more forcibly and integrate a design. He would paint a tree more broadly even than Manet, with fewer leaves and twigs, to emphasize its full green volume. In this he differed in degree of creativeness from his fellow-impressionists; he did not turn their attitude toward nature completely inside out and produce the mysterious thing which has been called Expressionism. But from his unusual amount and ways of distorting, younger artists took courage, and began to distort more consciously and frankly in the interest of plastic form. Some of them were impressed by the stark simplicity with which he occasionally emphasized the planes and edges of things; so they emphasized them yet more forcibly in stone as well as on canvas, dissociating natural objects into their constituent geometrical parts, simplifying and reassembling them to form designs called cubistic.

The majority of artists have not gone so far toward abstraction, preferring to retain the interest that attaches to a recognizable representation of nature. Even those who, like Picasso, sometimes experiment with cubism, usually compromise between pure abstraction and representation. They make the subject easily recognizable, sometimes interesting in itself, as in Matisse's Oriental women and Picasso's harlequins. But at the same time they freely alter its natural characteristics in order to reveal a pattern, or a distinctive quality of line or color.

It is just this compromise between representation and design which negro sculpture offers, and which has made it interesting at the present time. Artists like Picasso and Matisse, who had already started along the road which Cézanne opened up, have found it a confirmation of their beliefs and a stimulus to go further along that road. Several other prominent contemporaries, especially Modigliani and Soutine in painting, Lipchitz and Modigliani in sculpture, owe an obvious debt to negro art. One may cite also the Expressionists and similar modern groups in Germany, and Archipenko, Brancusi, Epstein and Lembruch among sculptors. These exemplify the power which the anonymous artists of the jungle are exerting upon the mind of a race widely separated from them in blood, civilization, geography and time. The modern works are not, of course, a basis for judging the merit of the ancient sources themselves. Primitive negro art, like most great originations, is essentially inimitable, and some of its power is apt to be lost in modern versions. Although several of the artists mentioned have made distinctly creative use of the negro inspiration, their works are too few and too recent to be taken as adequately representing what it may contribute to the art of the future. Already there are indications that this influence will not be confined to the plastic arts alone, nor to the present notable interest in the folklore and music of the negro himself (as exemplified in the works of Cendrars and Junod, previously referred to). Its forceful revelation of the nature of rhythmic, unified design, achieved through radical distortion of familiar forms, has drawn explicit acknowledgment of debt from such writers as Guillaume Apollinaire, and from such musical innovators as Stravinsky, Satie and "The Six."

Into modern plastic art, particularly, negro sculpture has by two main contributions thrown a ferment that must inevitably go on working. These are a general method and a storehouse of materials: its way of building up a design from the dissociated parts of a natural object, and the array of actual designs it achieved by this method. After catching the spell of its vigorous and seductive rhythms, no artist can return to academic banalities. Yet there is more to do than imitate the negro forms; they are capable of infinite development and combination with others, and of adaptation to new media. Potentially, their general method is more important than any particular designs. This has helped to liberate the artist from Renaissance traditions, yet given him a concrete basis to build upon. He is not told to make designs out of thin air, but shown a way of utilizing all nature in their production. These designs, if produced in the negro spirit, will be not abstract but rich with human interest, neither geometrical nor inchoate, but each a unity in variety. In an age when more than one voice has been heard to say that sculpture is obsolete, and the plastic arts exhausted, negro art has brought creative forces that may prove to be inexhaustible.

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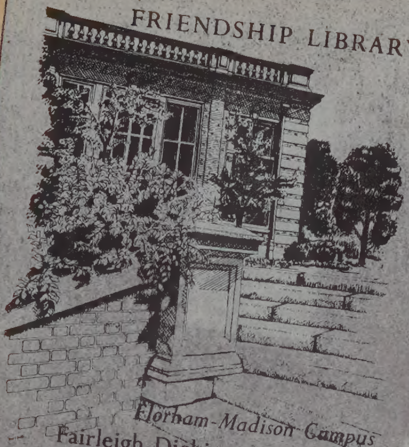

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